

## A Gift of Two

My father and his duplicate's performances at the *Coney Island Freakshow* are mostly a blend of simple memory tricks, juggling, light acrobatics and coordination. Much of what they say is completely false—all an act, folks! They have no sisters, uncles or cousins with deformities—those “relatives” you see are all hired freaks to sell the story, to create a show for your enjoyment. They seek out Siamese twins and folks with facial tumors to add a sense of suspense and danger, to imply what could have happened if their split had failed. This is necessary to bolster their act because, besides having captured footage of their duplication, little about them appears remarkable or worth your ten cents.

And yet, brave reader, I can report to you with 100% certainty that the duplication of one human into two that you witness in that film really occurred. The horror movie suspense music was actually added to make the footage appear LESS realistic, as early audiences grew uncomfortable!

100% TRUE! Shocking! True! Scientific Proof AND MORE SECRETS about our strange family history await the reader inside!

— Liam Barren, January 1972, Coney Island, Brooklyn, NY  
Introduction to *TWO! The Shocking Lives of the Barren Brothers!*

## PART ONE: 1977

### Chapter One

On Wednesday July 13, 1977, several days before Leonard Arturo Galletti duplicated, and halfway into an oppressively hot New York summer, the city lost power and then rioted.

That night, Catarina Galletti didn't reach Spanish Harlem until 3:00am. Without lighting, the staircase to her apartment felt unfamiliar and unsafe. Her lock was hard to manage in the darkness.

Inside, Leonard was on the floor—his back against their couch's armrest and still wearing his work suit—asleep. Near him was an unfamiliar baseball bat, a half-empty bottle of Jameson and a glowing flashlight that let her make out his features. He had a black eye and cut lip, but she couldn't see how bad it might be. The shadow-lines and weariness offered a glimpse of how he might look as an old man.

She closed the door quietly, intending to softly shake him awake. As she crossed the living room, her body was invaded by the sense of returning to a home located within him. This relief overwhelmed her stealth, and she kissed him awake roughly—his skin salty and familiar—until he kissed back.

“My queen returns,” Leonard said hazily, inching her face away but letting his hand linger on her cheek.

“Funny man,” she said. “You okay?”

He nodded, kept stroking her face and gripping her arm as if her return was a miracle. “Just scrapes from defending the shop. Went straight from work to look in on him.” His twin Dean worked at a nearby bike shop. “I didn't know where you were.”

“I was stuck between stations on the Six Train for hours. We ended up climbing out of the train and walking the tracks. When we reached a working payphone in the station, I wanted to call but everyone mobbed it. I got a group to walk together before everyone dispersed, to be safer. I was

only alone for the last two or three blocks.” She left out her time aboveground, when violent sounds wafted in from the distance: men shouting, glass shattering, sirens and building alarms. Once she was alone, the sounds ceased, making the final blocks more terrifying—she’d willed herself to become tiny and invisible as the sound of rats and other nighttime noises echoed through her bones. A roving band of young men passed her carrying small appliances and laundry bags full of looted clothing, jubilantly laughing. A sizable building was up in flames two blocks north of them.

Leonard nodded. She tried standing but he pulled her back, pulled her close, and she bit his neck. His exhaustion was evident in how limp his pull was. She inhaled the lovely stink of his dirty shirt and neck, briefly containing a piece of him in her lungs. The baseball bat that had been leaning against the couch fell and rattled, startling them, and they squeezed tighter still.

Leonard had a mustache and a short, lean, hairy body. Now 29, his face was fuller and less boyish than when they’d met, some white strands already peppering his black hair. Catarina liked tracing his left cheek dimple with her fingernail. He came from a long line of Brooklyn Italians. His olive skin tone was similar to Catarina’s, and each tanned a shade darker after time in the sun. He maintained concentrated eye contact during conversation, squinting at salient moments, giving him an air of thoughtful intensity. This effect was softened by his curling eyelashes, the kind women would kill for.

Catarina had recently turned 30. Her brown hair hung down to her shoulders. Her parents were Mexican with some Zapotec blood. She was a half-inch shorter than Leonard. Her own deep dimple emerged on her right cheek when she smiled, a symmetry that connected her and Leonard when they laughed together. Each could pass for the other’s ethnicity, a sometimes convenient and sometimes annoying fact. She had full lips and cheeks and this fullness extended to the rest of her body. She had been overweight until her freshman year of college. As she thinned, some fat

remained in places that drew male attention. Although Leonard said her eyes were always soft and playful, she'd learned to will sternness into them in court.

Leonard's grip loosened and Catarina reluctantly stood. She took off her top and threw it on the couch behind him. Feeling uncomfortably hot and sticky, she did the same thing with her bra, then took the flashlight to the kitchen and rinsed her face with soap, the water chilly and bracing. It felt so good she did her arms and neck too.

Catarina wet their cleanest dishrag and returned to Leonard. He'd fallen asleep again. She knotted the rag and wiped blood, oil and dirt from his face. Then, she removed his cufflinks and placed them on the nightstand. (Putting his cufflinks on in the morning was a task he always left for her: like putting the ribbon on a knight going off to war). He shuddered back awake and looked at her as if she were a stranger, until familiarity returned and his expression softened as she continued washing him. When she finished, she leaned back and allowed herself a sip from the half-empty bottle of whiskey.

"Come into the bed," she said. "You'll get a bad back if you sleep here."

He breathed in sharply as he stood, the pain of moving with bruises showing in his eyes. "Your night must have been hell," he said, following her. "I dreamt you returned, but I woke and you weren't here." She squeezed his hand in response, touched, feeling his tired longing for her, his worry.

"I was here, just not physically. You sure you're not hurt?" she asked, seeing him touch his ribcage carefully.

"Just the eye. This guy's elbow hit it. I don't even know if he even meant it, everything was crazy. They took out Jackie's Bikes. The whole inventory. Oh, and your mother got through. Call her."

She squeezed his hand again. “Tell me tomorrow.” She couldn’t even think about her mom. Now that she was home, she almost wished the telephone company didn’t have backup generation.

They fell into bed with only a sheet. She nestled into the curve of his shoulder, then looked down to survey his body. Still holding the rag, she wiped his chest around the neck, leaving wet dirty marks along the edges of his t-shirt. Lifting his shirt, she saw his chest and arms had bruises. A police car blared outside and briefly bathed the bedroom with multicolored lights as it went past. He squeezed her tightly, as if reassuring himself that she was really there, then fixed his gaze on her, his head still against the pillow.

Cleaning Leonard with the rag, she imagined him tracing her lips, a source of eternal fascination to him. She pictured taking those fingers into her mouth, teasing with her tongue, tasting his salt. In real life, she touched her favorite places to see if he’d rally: his arm and leg muscles, the hair on his chest and head. Resting in the crook of his neck again, she smelled his funk and toyed his semi-hard cock with the rag. She waited, but he didn’t trace her lips. Instead, his lustful eyes closed.

Lying next to his inert body, she let her eyes close and fantasized next steps: having sucked his fingers enough to set him in motion, she become passive, allowing him to put his cock in her mouth, squeeze her breasts, tongue her cunt, his fingers everywhere, her responding only with moans as her body was touched and viewed by him, him whispering, “I love you” just before entering her, one hand around her throat, the other cupping her ear to his mouth so she felt his lips mouth the syllables. Feeling his response to feeling her created a feedback loop that built until she came and then he came. All this was more memory than invention—her erotic mind often pulled storyboards from personal history rather than novel adventures or disconnected flashes like he claimed to have.

She opened her eyes and looked around the dark room as though it disappointed her. She briefly watched him sleep, then took the flashlight and got up to use the phone.

The bedroom was furnished with a bed, a shared dresser, a cheap full-length mirror, a floor lamp, and a walnut vanity with mother-of-pearl inlay that was a relic of her prior marriage to a wealthy man. When the movers had brought it into their first shared apartment, Leonard said he'd never seen anything that fancy, and later that night confessed a dread that his prospects weren't sufficient to make her happy. She'd kissed him and told him that his body alone was sufficient.

She'd mostly meant this but, in fact, she did care about money. Her first husband's casual embrace of wealth had been convenient but off-putting; while Leonard's mistrust of materialism was refreshing but excessive. She loved her extravagant feminine enclave: the vanity's oval mirror, a jewelry mannequin hand with her rings and necklaces, photos of her and Leonard's wedding day, perfumes, correspondence mostly from Leonard but also from family, friends, and a few ancient notes from her first husband. Thick rosary beads dangling from a small wooden balcony. Nothing had been recently dusted.

Only a wooden table marked the separation between the kitchen, where the phone was, and living room. The living room was furnished with a crowded bookcase, frayed pea-green couch, and vintage hand-ringer washing machine that had two green, white and red flag magnets on the side. They liked that their ethnic flags shared colors; Leonard owned a flag belt buckle and Catarina had a tri-colored fiesta dress that they sometimes wore together playfully. Indoor plants included a money tree and lucky bamboo from Chinatown, while outside the window tomatoes and herbs peeked in from the fire escape. The walls were covered with impressionist landscapes painted by Leonard's friends. She didn't mind them, but wouldn't have chosen them.

The framed photos they'd taken during their honeymoon through Oaxaca and Chiapas in southern Mexico were among her most prized items. That had been an insatiable period, the coda to a whirlwind courtship that overlapped with her first marriage. The beginning of her relationship with

Leonard had been full of uncertainty and heartache until that escape, where strangers treated them like any other honeymooning tourists.

Catarina phoned her mother Carmen and sister Gabby several times but couldn't get through. Everyone was likely asleep anyhow. She then secured the metal rod that connected a brass metal box to a floor fixture to complete the floor-mounted bolt security system. Her sister's husband, Tavo, had scavenged the system from a construction job site.

The apartment felt safer from the chaos outside when all this was done, but in the time between the rod clicking into place and sliding into bed, their New York adventure took on an air of failure. The time had come to retreat to Philadelphia and try something, anything, else. She'd raise the idea with Leonard once things calmed down. He wouldn't like it.

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Shortly before dawn, Catarina woke to ringing. It was the exhausted voice of her boss Deputy Christopher O'Donnell.

O'Donnell oversaw about half the office's women, including Catarina's law school friend Maddie. Soon after Catarina started, several secretaries independently told her this was a good thing; he was the best supervisor for women. He was married and never spoke of his personal life, or asked about others'. Catarina and O'Donnell quickly bonded in unspoken ways. On her first Ash Wednesday morning commute, her subway stop in Spanish Harlem was a sea of ashed foreheads, many having just left the same service as her. The sea thinned as she rode downtown. At the DA's office itself, she and O'Donnell were among the only ones with the mark. She soon learned that even practicing Catholics often postponed the ritual until after work out of respect for law's secular mission.

The morning after the riots, he told Catarina that she was to be escorted to Manhattan's Criminal Court in a patrol car in about fifteen minutes. As they spoke, Catarina stretched the phone

cord and tried the kitchen light. The power was still out and smell of burnt smoke lingered in the air. She hung up, grateful not to have to return to the subway but overwhelmed by whatever waited at the courthouse. Immediately after, she reached her mother and talked just long enough to reassure her.

“I’m going in,” Catarina said to Leonard as she dressed.

“Want me to come?” Leonard asked from the bed. “I bet Capra & Cipriani is closed until Monday at least.” Leonard was an attorney at a Brooklyn immigration firm.

“They’re sending a patrol car soon. I guess subways are still down. Just heal, okay?” she said.

“The D.A.’s office must really need bodies.” He paused. “I’d rather you not come home alone.”

“I’ll ask if New York’s finest can chauffeur me.”

She laid back down and pressed herself to him silently until police lights flashed through their bedroom window.

Heading down, her steps echoed in the dim staircase. The flashing red-and-blue glare was blinding when she stepped outside.

“Ms. Galletti?” a voice asked through a sliver of a patrol car window.

Catarina nodded. Through the mesh protective glass that reminded her unexpectedly of a confession booth screen, both officers looked indistinguishable: irritable, white and washed out. Riding in the backseat of cop cars with no interior door handles, she was always unsettled by the inability to get out. It made her feel as though a prison sentence had already begun.

On Broadway, hesitant teenagers were sneaking into a head shop.

“They’ll be disappointed,” her driver said, sucking through his teeth. “Those stores were picked clean hours ago.”

The ride took twenty minutes without traffic. Today, between avoiding debris, downtown traffic and blocked off streets, the trip lasted over an hour.

Finally, they reached Centre Street and the four interconnected granite and limestone art deco towers that housed the looming criminal courthouse. The entire block was filled with cop cars, their silently flashing lights illuminating the building's façade and Catarina's skin as she left the car and went inside.

Catarina entered the two-story lobby with its marble columns, wood paneling and a giant hanging clock in the center. The lobby was framed by two giant spiral staircases leading to upper balconies that connected with various judge chambers and office rooms. The stairs were designed more for esthetics than for function—the step treads were too long and the bannister too high—and so people used the elevators when possible. The lobby's grand effect was lessened on closer inspection: everything was worn and the ancient, ornately-detailed elevators were currently out-of-order, requiring Catarina to walk the giant staircase. Halfway up the flow of the crowd going up the steps pushed her to the railing. Looking down, a flood of defendants was in the lobby, many still caked in dried blood, herded around via flashlight and gas lamp. This and the emerging dawn light allowed her to spot cops with their names and badge numbers covered with electric tape or simply removed, a troubling breach of protocol. She caught the eye of a red-haired cop who she had taken testimony from often, a favorite. When he looked up, she tapped her chest to indicate the absence of the badge, and mouthed *what the fuck?* He shook his head blankly and kept leading his perp.

Deputy O'Donnell was in a courthouse conference room set aside for the D.A. frantically paging through paperwork. He reported that every precinct's holding pen was full, as was every jail cell, and they'd even reopened the infamous Tombs, which had closed in '74 after the City decided the jail was irredeemably inhumane. The police were starting to send the looters to the courthouse for arraignment. A courthouse backup generator provided sporadic relief but was easily overtaxed.

As he said this, he noticed and turned off his lamp. “Perhaps if we hadn’t laid everyone off, we wouldn’t be so understaffed and unprepared,” he added.

Catarina was among several assistant district attorneys tasked with managing the arraignments and bail for the prior night’s mass arrests. Everything she needed to do her job properly—evidence, arresting officer’s accounts, sometimes even a basic description of the alleged crime—was missing. She couldn’t get background data or criminal history from Albany since the recently installed central computers were down. Few rioters had been arrested with identification. She couldn’t always find out which officers had brought in what defendants. A bailiff reported that the medical staff was inundated and had insufficient resources to even determine who urgently needed help and who could wait.

Around noon, the power came back and everyone in the courtroom clapped. Catarina had just completed her first arraignment and grant of bail. From there everything sped up: the prosecutor, defense, and judge all tacitly acknowledged that what followed would be imperfect justice.

At 1:00pm, she spoke on the phone briefly to Leonard as someone passed around paper cups full of lukewarm soup. She ate without questioning its source or contents. As predicted, Leonard’s law office had decided to remain closed. He’d slept in until eleven. He offered to come down with dinner and to escort her home. She declined. As she spoke, lights from a black and white television splashed over her face, clips of mobs looting department stores the night before.

By 3:00pm, she was up to ten resolved cases. When the eleventh defendant was called, nobody arrived for several minutes. Finally, a shaken-looking guard walked solemnly to the judge, who gathered with the courtroom officer, Catarina and the defense attorney. The guard whispered that the defendant had died from heat exposure. He’d been kept with several others in a basement

storage room that was being used for overflow. Catarina took deep breaths, buying time to collect herself.

“Okay,” she said calmly. “Thanks.” She asked the courtroom officer and guard if water could be found for the remaining defendants in that storage room. They both nodded.

Catarina then moved to dismiss the case as a formality. As the judge and defense attorney agreed, Catarina took a last look at the defendant’s name, committing it to memory as a minor gesture: Manuel Ramirez.

Another defendant assigned to her would die from untreated wounds sustained during the riot. He’d reported a blow to the head to the arresting officer, though little more than a light bruise was visible, and many rioters were making similar complaints. Word passed between prosecutors that the Bronx also had a pair of identical twins who’d died in their cell. They’d been discovered rioting nude and then howled in their cells all night claiming they were starving.

The defendants that day differed from those Catarina typically prosecuted: they were older or younger than her average, without the demeanor of experienced lawbreakers. The ecstasy of rioting having worn off, they looked uniformly dejected, beaten, and sometimes ashamed. She believed them more than usual when they said their family couldn’t afford bail, that even a small fine or missing work could break them. Some defendants recognized that Catarina was Hispanic and appealed to her in Spanish. Other days she might have let them say their piece, but this day was all about getting through the list. She cut them off firmly if the judge or public defender didn’t lose patience first.

One defendant lived in the same squats near Tompkins Square where Leonard lived before their marriage, during his brief stint as a pot dealer. The association surprised her, and she imagined the young men and women who occupied the front steps, eyes following her, when she’d visited

Leonard early in their courtship. The defendant was accused of looting an AKS valued at over \$1,000.

“An AKS? What is that, even?” Catarina asked the courtroom officer, who shrugged.

“It’s like a synthesizer that comes in a briefcase,” the defendant said. His attorney placed a hand on his shoulder.

“A synthesizer?” Catarina asked.

The defendant laughed. “You know: for making music, mixing songs.” His attorney whispered in his ear. “So what?” the defendant said. “Knowing what a synthesizer is isn’t illegal.”

“Court back in session,” the courtroom deputy said.

“Charges?” the judge asked.

“Your honor, theft of an E.M.S. V.C.S. Three. A musical synthesizer,” Catarina said.

“Defense’s Plea?”

“Not guilty, your honor,” the defense attorney said.

“Prosecutor, what are you asking for bail here?”

“Your honor,” Catarina said, “defense is trying to get in touch with defendant’s mother and if she brings proof of address and vouches that she’ll get him here on his court date, then on his own recognizance, conditioned on his and his mother’s promise of his appearance.”

The judge took off his glasses and looked at the defendant with contempt. “He’s not a minor.” The judge was, like most judges, a former prosecutor and in his eyes was an instinct to set something stricter.

“The People recognize that,” Catarina said.

“Defense?”

“Defense has no objection,” the defense attorney said.

“I won’t stand in the way of happy agreement,” the judge said. “We’ll set a court date at a later time.” As he slammed his gavel, anger flared in Catarina toward the young defendant for breaking the law and risking his body for a synthesizer, then toward the entire justice system.

To win back the judge’s esteem, Catarina requested higher-than-reasonable bail conditions for the next few defendants. The defense attorney grouched, earning Catarina points with the judge. She’d expected to be overruled for overreach but instead after the third defendant the judge asked the defense attorney, “Are we getting through these, or are you going to grandstand all day? Appeal everything tomorrow if you’re so unhappy.” After this, the defense attorney caved and, to Catarina’s dismay, her unreasonable terms became the new normal, making her feel unclean.

As the day continued, she regretted turning down Leonard’s offers to collect her. She wouldn’t be able to leave any time soon and who knew if a car could take her. Perhaps he could still come down, but she didn’t want to risk his getting harmed on the way.

The power went out again in the late afternoon. The local generator came on to provide the courtroom with light, but frequently, sometimes as Catarina was speaking, the lights would go out and courthouse staff had to put on flashlights and gas lanterns. Then the generator came back on, and the flashlights went off. Minutes later, the ritual repeated itself.

Just after dark, a colleague let Catarina know Leonard was calling from a payphone. “A payphone?” Catarina asked.

“They’re getting through better than home phones,” the colleague said.

In the attorney breakroom, a woman was crying while three or four others smoked cigarettes and stared blankly forward, offering no comfort. A man poured clear liquid from a flask into his coffee.

“Leonard?” Catarina asked. “Are you safe?”

“Yeah, fine,” Leonard said. Her shoulders relaxed at the sound of his voice. “I’m at the corner outside the bike shop, helping my brother clean up the aftermath.”

“Give up the bike shop if the looting starts up again. Okay? Don’t fight for it.”

“Okay,” he said. “There’s not much left to take. No bikes; no cash. Did you change your mind? Want me to come bring some real food, your toothbrush? I can bike.”

She paused, recalling the walk the night before, the smell of smoke. Even walking around the corner alone to sleep in her office at the District Attorney’s felt unsafe. Her clothes looked like she’d been wearing them for far longer than twelve hours and her face felt covered with a thin sheet of oily sweat.

“Yeah, come. That way I can keep track of you.” As she said this, an automated voice asked for more change, which for some reason blended with a separate call happening in what sounded like Yiddish. She felt panic that Leonard hadn’t heard her.

“I have more change,” Leonard said, breaking through and blending with the strangers’ voices. When he said this, one of the strangers switched to English and asked, “Hello, someone else on this line? Ikh farshtey nisht. Hello?”

“Come before it gets too dark,” Catarina said. “Wish Dean well. I should get back to it. Turn around if there is any sign of trouble.”

After the click of Leonard hanging up, the stranger on the crossed line said, “Hello? Rachel? Rachel? Are you still there?”

Catarina replaced the phone in its cradle.

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Leonard arrived around 8:30pm and took a seat in the gallery benches. Catarina requested a recess at first opportunity and took him to the attorney breakroom. Once there, he gave her a bean and rice burrito. She ate ravenously, self-conscious about how she looked but unable to slow.

The TV played clips of pedestrians who said they saw a flash of light downtown just before the lights went out, followed by Mayor Beame calling for calm and restoration of order following “an evening of terror.” The announcer then gave a rundown of the neighborhoods where unrest was still ongoing. Only the Bronx still had active looting, while Manhattan would be safe once Leonard got out of Spanish Harlem.

“Beame’s complaining, but he set this up himself,” Leonard said. “Gut budgets and you can’t be prepared. Sanitation barely running, closing hospitals. What did he expect to happen when his solution to everything is raiding public pensions and gutting unions; acting as though uppity proletariats and too much government largesse got us here, and not his corrupt mismanagement.” He sounded like his father Alessandro, a union journeyman.

“I had a defendant die awaiting arraignment,” she said between bites. “Manuel Ramirez.”

“So fucking avoidable. The rich will just move to the suburbs and wash their hands.”

His righteous side often expressed her unarticulated anger, but the burrito made her too content to engage more. “There was also a kid who lived in the same building as your old squat,” she said.

“Really? By Tompkins? What did he do?”

“Stole a musical device. A synthesizer.”

“I bet he’s that lady on the first floor’s kid.” His face mellowed.

The squat building was full of families living without leases or deeds to their apartments—no legal right. Sometimes when Catarina had visited, she would catch a Latin or funk beat coming from the first-floor window.

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They finished the last case around three a.m. The judge announced he was going to his chambers to sleep for a few hours and advised everyone else to do the same. Leonard was already

laying on his back across the gallery benches, *War of the Worlds* on his chest. She simultaneously felt warmed by his presence and overly-protected. Likely, he was the only spouse to come to the courthouse that day. He was on her turf, pushing himself into her workplace realm, but she also felt safer. She willed herself to focus on her gratefulness. Without thinking further, she pushed his paperback so it landed with an echoed thud on the floor, then crawled onto him and rested her head on his chest. His legs and hips were boney and awkward under her body, and the bench was too narrow. She stayed like this anyway. He stirred and stroked her hair as she fell into an uneasy sleep.

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Catarina woke disoriented, startled from sleep by the judge's gavel. The defense attorney was still sleeping several rows to her right. Around them, the courtroom was coming back to life: people all around her, a new judge behind the bench, the galley filling up with attorneys, reporters, and defendants' families. Leonard's head was leaned back in an unnatural pose. She shook him awake.

As the two left the courthouse, a colleague spotted Catarina and asked if she could take a 2:00pm shift. She asked why. He said he didn't want to be away from his family during this. She coldly stared him down until he wilted and withdrew his request. He meekly noted that he had young kids at home, leaving unsaid his knowledge that she didn't.

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Leonard rode with Catarina on the handlebars. The streets going east to the West Side Highway were full of debris but clear of people. Leonard stopped to put out a smoldering couch using a nearby drinking fountain and trashed plastic milk jug.

As they reached the turnoff for the West Side Highway, near a stoplight with a cracked red signal, they saw two squeegee men waiting for traffic to return. One looked bored and anxious, scanning the Henry Hudson Parkway for cars while squeezing his dirty yellow sponge into a

compound bucket, then soaking it again. The other sat and looked blank as he smoked and raked a dirty patch of grass with his squeegee.

Leonard rode north, past the section of the elevated portion that had collapsed in the winter of '73 under the weight of a sanitation vehicle, though the rubble looked like it could have happened during the riots.

As he pedaled to midtown, a weathered truck sat improbably on top of a building alongside the West Side Highway. The truck was painted dramatically in red, white and blue, and bursting white stars. Catarina whispered to Leonard that when she was small and visited the city from Philly, her father used to swear that he'd seen a driver in it. The truck was actually a metal shell placed as an ad, but Catarina still looked for the driver as an adult.

Leonard stopped and leaned his bike against the first of a pair of cars that had collided and been abandoned in the middle of the highway. He sat up on the first car hood.

She slid onto the other car's hood, not clear why they'd stopped. He was quiet so she started talking about cases from the night before.

"Look," he said, pointing. She turned, expecting him to be looking at her or the fake truck, but his eyes were focused on the mid-distance, on a rusted-out fence on the side of the highway.

"I'm trying to have a conversation."

"Humor me."

A pigeon was in the fencing adjusting its nest. Catarina glanced back at Leonard, who was absorbed. When she looked at the nest again, she let the scene absorb her too. She saw the water droplets hanging from the twigs, and the random material used for the nest—candy wrappers, straws and anonymous bits of aluminum. Catarina decided the bird was about to be a mother.

The pigeon flapped her wings, startling Catarina back into her body.

"She's a sad little thing, isn't she?" Catarina asked. "But she seems pretty content."

“Completely oblivious to us,” Leonard said. “No concerns about riots. About the future.”

“I guess so. She just goes on living. Adapting. Using whatever’s around her. And that’s good enough.”

The bird looked back at them, as if they had been rude to act like she was in a zoo, then flew off to show how free she was. Catarina half-expected to see baby pigeons in the nest, but it was empty.

“Perhaps she’s pregnant. And preparing,” Catarina said.

Leonard laughed. “I can’t tell. I don’t know a damn thing about pigeons.”

She smiled. “Neither do I.”

Just before re-mounting the bike, she touched her palm to her wrist, then squeezed, assessing herself. She’d needed a pause, and admired Leonard’s eye for beauty in the obvious and nearby. She tried to do the same as they rode. She spent the trip home admiring the muscles of Leonard’s legs shifting beneath his skin as he biked. As he exercised, she could see the brute in him, and she missed the brute when it was away for too long.

By the time they reached their apartment, Catarina felt renewed, sticky, and full of warm exhaustion. Leonard carried her up the stairs, tossed her on the bed, set up the security system, and joined her.

## Chapter Two

On Friday, Catarina slept until 2:00 p.m. Leonard informed her that the DA's had called and told her to stay home.

While she'd slept, the power had returned and the supermarket across the street had reopened.

Additionally, two new abandoned cars had appeared on the block overnight, including one that had jumped the curb in front of the supermarket window, and had its license plate removed. Someone had smashed their way into the other one and tried their luck despite a windshield sign announcing "No Radio, Already Stolen." This brought the block's current tally of derelict cars to five.

Shortly after moving to Spanish Harlem, Catarina had reported two junked cars to various municipal services. She'd hoped their removal would make the block feel safer. She was rudely rebuffed. When this failed, Catarina paid some neighborhood kids to wash the two cars: a canary yellow Studebaker that may have once been nice, and a rusted brown Ford truck that had never been nice. As they cleaned, they found a way inside the Studebaker and the cleaning became a game—one splayed out on the roof and made upside-down faces through the windshield as the other two pretended to drive. Afterwards, the cars looked strange—flat-tired, scratched and no tags, but clean. Perhaps now alluring enough to steal, the Studebaker disappeared soon thereafter. Leonard's friend from the used-car lot towed the other to a junkyard as a favor. In time, another junked car appeared, and then another and another. Catarina gave up.

Years before this, when Catarina had lived with Duncan two miles south along Central Park, her taxi to law school came on a remarkable scene at the intersection of 96st and Third Avenue—the border between the Upper East Side and Spanish Harlem. It had been completely blockaded flaming debris (trash cans, mattresses, fridges, couches). For their effort, the police were giving the

perpetrators a rough beating. They were Puerto Rican teenagers calling themselves the Young Lords, who had brought down street junk from Spanish Harlem to protest unfair, neglectful trash collection practices. Back then, Catarina had been frightened and inconvenienced by the flaming blockade, but now she wished the Young Lords (long since disbanded) would return to take junked cars and block Park Avenue.

In the present, Catarina and Leonard took an afternoon walk. The sporting goods store had been cleaned to the bones, the mannequins were laying amongst pools of shattered glass on the floor—the scene was almost indecent, stripped to their socks, their sexless privates bared. Two blocks north was a burned-out off-track-betting place—betting slips and paperwork blanked the street. Salsa music played outside. Someone had hacked into a street lamp’s wiring, openly pirating the city’s electricity for the speakers. In the building’s shell, old Puerto Ricans were seated around a plastic table playing cards. Catarina pulled Leonard close and danced as they walked, drawing a smile from him.

“Aren’t they scared that the roof will collapse on them?” Leonard asked softly into her ear after pulling her close. Catarina shrugged.

Several blocks later, Spanish Harlem’s black market expanded beyond typical illegal goods to include everyday items. Leonard and Catarina bought women’s disposable razors and a mattress the seller claimed came straight from Macy’s. Their old mattress had rusted coil marks showing through the fabric and smelled of several years of sex and sleep. They discussed the ethics of these purchases at length. In the end, the distinction between goods stolen from a local business and a major chain made the difference.

After they carried their new mattress up the stairs, he made dinner while she showered. Unlike their last place, the hot water was consistent and the pressure was strong. However, the water

went from ice cold to unbearably hot at the slightest touch. Leonard was best at finding the sweet spot, and so he turned the shower on for her. Even on the perfect setting the occasional icy stream would intermingle with the heat. She trained herself not to react when this happened.

To escape the bathroom, Catarina had to slowly roll the wringer-washing machine he'd put in her path to make space in the kitchen. She didn't ask for help because she disliked admitting difficulty in acts of strength. Early in their marriage, she'd run her first marathon in heavy rain while he biked beside her. She started getting painful blisters around mile five. She stopped and let him use the knife on his bike tool to slice open the largest ones, letting the rain clean them out, then wrapped each foot with his duct tape and began running again. Leonard repeated this story to their friends with awe for years. Her refusal to ask for help in moving the washer was, in a small way, an attempt to preserve that awe.

Leonard prepped the table while she dressed. The fragrance of the burrito ingredients (beans, onion, garlic, jalapenos) blended with one of a nearby burned-out pharmacy, which gave off an ashy smell that had soaked into all of their clothes and furniture.

After they ate, he rummaged through his pockets.

"I have something for you," he said, excited.

He pulled the *Brooklyn Law Journal* classifieds from his briefcase. Circled was a call for a federal prosecutor position in Brooklyn.

"You'd be perfect, wouldn't you?" She didn't respond. "You have more experience than they want. We could share the commute to Brooklyn, and you wouldn't have to compete against those Harvard guys who'd rather take any Manhattan gig than step foot in Brooklyn."

"I—thanks, Leonard. How did you hear about this before me?" she asked, smiling. She'd seen the listing, applied and been rejected about a month before. She'd mentioned it then, but he

hadn't connected the openings. She lied without thinking, but after she chose not to correct herself. There seemed no need to deflate his kindness, his hopeful look.

"Maybe you were only looking in the 'Jobs for Women' section," he said. The *Journal's* Help-Wanted had, like most papers, been separated into jobs for men (attorney, paralegal) and for women (secretary, translator, stenographer) until a '73 supreme court case. While the explicate labels were now removed, the layout hadn't changed much. She slapped him indifferently while pretending to glance at the ad from across the table. "You're not allowed to make that joke."

"Seriously though, all you'd need to do at the interview is drop how the CIA taught you to read upside-down." She smiled winningly, though the fact that the ad was still running evoked shame. She wasn't even rejected for anyone specific. "At that level where they're stuck doing domestic cases," Leonard continued, "the only thing left to idealize is international spy-craft. Evokes James Bond for them instead of due process and warrants."

"That was only for a few months in college," she said. During her senior year in college, a smooth, handsome visiting professor approached her at Barnard. He eased her into the recruitment process so gently, she hadn't grasped that she was being groomed until the all-in pitch. He taught her reading upside-down, using reflective surfaces to catch people tailing you and keeping track of exit paths in any room. After a few months, he took her to a field office and described some regime-change missions they were working on in South American. He spat after mentioning Castro. He casually disclosed that sexual allure was among the most powerful means to charm assets. She felt shame that he thought she'd do this, and saw she'd been naive for thinking her selection was based on savvy, rather than being an attractive, presentable Latina. She told herself she'd gotten that far into recruitment only because the recruiter came when she was newly thin, unable to conceive of her beauty as sufficient to weaponize. Still, perhaps her recruitment might have gone further if she

wasn't happy with Duncan and already taking steps for law school. She'd been thankful to Duncan for helping her avoid that path.

She bit her thumb. "I'll ask around," she managed, and with these words felt done with her job and done with New York. "Hey, do you ever feel like we're in a neighborhood where we don't belong? Like we're in it, but not a part of it?"

"It's what we can afford, same as anyone else here."

Acquaintances sometimes assumed they were rich because they were lawyers, requiring explanation at indelicate moments that most lawyers' incomes were commensurate with their clients' wealth. Leonard worked at a firm that served poor immigrants. The district attorneys' only client was City Hall, which was broke. They also sent a quarter of their earnings to their families and to service school loans.

"Yes, but the reasons we can't afford a better neighborhood matter too, right? You're choosing to be poor by doing something idealistic. And in a few years, we'll hopefully be making more. People I know at church here talk about getting out, but most won't." His solemn face showed her words were getting through. Even if their income wasn't much more than their neighbors, they were separated from those around them by *potential*—future paths enabled by their education and jobs—and the unstated certainty that wouldn't always be struggling. They were both, in some sense, slumming it by living in the *barrio*. Guests on an enviable trajectory.

"Preserving a connection to where we come from is good," he said. "We don't *look* out of place, and neither of us come from money. Isn't it nice to hear Spanish in the streets and the music?"

"I don't feel a connection. Neither of us grew up here. Our friends are all downtown or in Brooklyn. Anyhow, there's more Puerto Ricans than Mexicans, and the Italians are old or moving out. So, how valuable is having bodegas or Italian pastries nearby if I need to worry about getting

mugged all the time? Do you know the murders nearby this year alone? Danny Sanders, strangulation, tenth floor of this building.” She was ready to list more names, blocks, apartments, causes-of-death when he cut her short.

“So, what do we do? Take out a loan and head to Brooklyn Heights? Even if we could do that, how would that change us? Think about living with Duncan overlooking Central Park and how you felt like you were in a fairy tale tower with people doing your laundry, fancy appliances and a wicked stepmother who visited every weekend to judge you, but then you got used to the new standard of living like”—his fingers snapped—“that. You can lose yourself so easily. And I’m not saying I wouldn’t change too; I’m saying I’m afraid I will.”

“Maybe the solution is we should move to Philly for a while, where we do have family. That’s affordable, less competition to move up, roots. Get a fresh start. If the promotion hasn’t come at the DA’s yet, how’s anything going to be different if I stay? I don’t want to wake up and it be 1980 and I’m still trying minor crimes and you’re still doing a job you don’t want.”

He rubbed his napkin on the table. “Are we talking about you not wanting to be in Spanish Harlem, or are you talking about how you don’t want to be a DA anymore?”

“Both.”

“I don’t want to run away from her when she’s at her lowest.” Catarina took a second to get that ‘her’ meant New York City. “And there’s my brother. My parents. Our friends.”

Moving would be a hard sell. She considered mentioning children. They both wanted them, but she wasn’t sure if moving to Philly would make her ready. “My parents are alone in Philly,” she said instead. “It’d be nice to be closer to them.” Her parents were divorced, and didn’t even talk these days. “Your parents have each other, and your brother.”

His body tightened. “Your parents have your sister.”

“This is getting away from the point. We’ve plateaued here.”

“I’m not drifting—I’m doing something helpful that we both believe in.” He said this in a low voice that let her know she’d hit something sore.

“Babe, I know you are and I love your idealism—but we used to talk about changing the world. Now, it’s J-1 visas for Russian circuses and H-1B worker visa quotas. I want more for us both.”

He didn’t respond right away, the wheels in his mind turning. “I’ve made the same point,”—acknowledging she’d used his old gripes about work to support her argument—“but moving to Philly would mean new bar exams and finding new jobs that might have the same limitations. And we’d need to push back other important life stages.”

“We can’t have kids in an environment like this,” she said. “Leo, I don’t feel safe anymore.”

Leonard took off his glasses as he always did when getting to something. “And there’s a place in Philly that we could afford, where you’d feel safe?”

“Safer? We could look into neighborhood costs at least.”

“Let’s look into it then,” he said, not meaning it, avoiding her eyes.

As they cleared the table, she touched his forearm and bumped his hip, trying to shake him out of his mood, and make him feel more present in the room with her.

He nodded and gave a brief smile. She put on the radio to break the tension a bit, deciding to let him stew a bit, and her thoughts went to the possibilities of the job opportunity. Nobody was hiring right now for anything worth having, and the slots that did open received a million applicants and mostly went to folks with the right connections. Connections like her ex-husband’s family.

Mayor Beame was on the radio discussing lingering brownouts and his disgust with Con Edison. The reporter interviewing him noted that a thirty block stretch of Broadway had been burned down, 500 police officers were injured, and asked, “Does the City have enough cash on hand

to pay for the emergency costs caused by the blackout and is a bankruptcy option being considered again?”

Before Mayor Beame responded, a bowl fell through Leonard’s hands. He collapsed to the floor. Catarina froze. Then she went to him.

“I’m fine. I’m fine,” Leonard said. He sat up and weakly pushed her away.

“You’re sweaty,” she said. “A fever maybe?” He always had a higher than normal core temperature. That he was hotter still was alarming.

“It’s nothing.”

They sat silently on the tile between the fridge and counter until his breathing normalized, then he walked to the bed unassisted.

“The tingling feels nice,” he said, lying limp on their new mattress. “Sorry if I frightened you.”

He cupped her hand and cracked her knuckles, causing the familiar pop. He hadn’t done it in a while and nostalgia rippled through her. She asked him to recount the moments leading up to the fall, then if he’d felt anything strange recently. He insisted he was fine and how beautiful she was, repeating the phrase almost unconsciously and touching her lips limply. She kissed the fingers. He closed his eyes. She sat with him for a time, stroking his arm, until he snored. She blamed the heat and the poor night’s sleep. She brought him some water for when he woke and wet a rag and placed it on his brow for the second time that week, kissed his cheek and left. He’d refuse to see a doctor so late.

The apartment’s radiator turned on randomly even in the summertime. It clanked and dripped often enough that they kept a browned towel underneath it at all times. Catarina went to the radiator, twisting the dials on the side, tinkered, got it to shut down. While there, she fingered the soil of Leonard’s basil and cherry tomato plants on their fire escape. They dried out so fast in this

heat. Across the street was the largest supermarket in Spanish Harlem and its four bottle-collection machines. The lines at the automated collection bins were typically slow but civilized. Sometimes frequent users would grow angry with a newcomer who didn't know to put the rear of the bottle in first, or else the machine would reject it. Even at this late hour, a small line was out there, with one man sitting in a derelict rolling chair, waiting. One of the machines was lying on its side, broken in the riot.

She then retreated to the couch with her work and a light sheet and pillow. Being alone was familiar, as he often fell asleep hours before her. They woke around the same time but the very act of living seemed to drain him far more than her, requiring constant retreats. Early in the relationship, she'd enjoyed watching him sleep and even his light snore. She'd been given extra time in life during which she could do whatever she pleased. Later, she tired of his snoring and disliked that they were losing hours that they could be talking, drinking and having sex. She felt slighted, as though he were attempting to escape her. Finally, she made peace, though those hours remained a lonely experience she often filled with schoolwork and then later casework.

Lying on the couch, she reread the job application Leonard had found, considered her lie, and whether he was right that leaving for Philly would be a futile step sideways and if the job she truly wanted simply didn't exist.

She turned to her volunteer work for the Hispanic Bar Association. She was editing a How-To manual for navigating the immigration system and finding pro-bono counsel, a guaranteed right for criminal—but not immigration or civil—cases. It was dry work and hard to focus on.

As she pushed herself to continue, she reminded herself that if she was going to leave the city that it was something that she should wrap up. Then she asked herself *why do it at all?* It felt futile. For resilience, she pulled out a draft of her law school entrance essay, where she had recounted watching Edward R. Murrow's *Harvest of Shame* when she was around fifteen, bursting

with idealism, just forming her thoughts about migrant agricultural workers. She and her father read everything about Cesar Chavez, his rise from Mexican farm worker to leading grape pickers' strikes. Even Catarina's apolitical mother Carmen admired Chavez, calling him "such a handsome, good man" every time his name came up. From here, Catarina's essay switched to discussing her respect for rule of law and its fair application.

She left out another reason for wanting to go to law school: her grandmother's take on the grape-picker strikes that lingered in Catarina's mind the sharpest. After a particular strike collapsed, she'd said, "Catarina, always be the person in power, not the person asking people with power to do something. You're just a noble beggar asking for justice, and it never lasts. In another few years everyone will miss cheap grapes and forget." Thus, someone who cared about civil rights was better off running the courthouse rather than protesting outside the courthouse walls.

The How-To manual felt like a blend of her own idealism and her grandmother's pragmatism: giving indigent defendants insights into navigating the legal system from her insider's perch as prosecutor.

Without making progress, Catarina slowly fell asleep on the couch.

\* \* \*

Leonard—dozing in the bedroom to the sound of Catarina's typewriter in the next room—felt sticky and sweaty and unfocused. He recalled the day before she left her first husband for him. She and Leonard shared a drink at a cop bar where they often met in those days, and she told him everything, including that her first marriage had fallen apart because they'd taken each other for granted.

Working too hard was in her nature, so the dance was knowing when to indulge her and when to pull her away from work. In this context, her suggestion to move had confused him. If

she'd mentioned children, the discussion would have made sense. Instead, she sounded defeated, ready to give up her ambitions for a simpler life in a smaller city.

His own aspirations didn't fit neatly into either route: in New York he'd continue on at Capra & Cipriani LLP to support them and in Philly he'd, what, be at a new immigration firm in an unfamiliar city? Either option sounded unappealing. Perhaps if they stayed in New York Leonard could find something else that paid better. Or go the other way: quit law, open a small business to help rebuild the City, and find something that would pay better. A new bike shop branch for the guy who owned Jackie's Bikes? That likely didn't pay anything. A stupid idea.

His mind flashed with scenes of the ruins they saw over the past few days, the unsafe streets and defending the bike shop with a bat. He replayed Catarina's defeated tone at dinner for significance. He tried to pin the source of her defeat, and what could be done to heal it. The fabric of the city felt like it was coming apart at the seams and he wondered if the marriage was entering that delicate place too. He felt insufficient to give her what she needed to remove that tone, without the money or connections to make her path easier, or even move her to a safer area.

Without a clear line between sleep and being awake, he slipped into uneasy dreams. A slowly building pain wove clumsily into and out of their contents.

He woke terrified that he was losing Catarina. The idea flooded him quickly, almost physically, as if all the chaos and rioting in the streets had moved into his cells, flooding outward from in his chest.

As he grew more awake, he searched for the source of this insecurity. She was not in the bed next to him, she had likely fallen asleep on the couch, which might explain the wave of emotion. The fight had not been that bad, but had uncovered his long-buried unease and insecurity that she might leave him and upgrade (as she had when she left her first husband). Each day she left their lousy apartment and worked alongside countless faceless, exciting options. In his imagination he

conjured men who spoke to her confidently, understood aspects of her that were elusive to him: the craft of prosecuting criminals, the pressures of putting away murderers and protecting victims. They complimented her. They invited her constantly to ambiguous lunches or City Bar events that she always declined.

A new affair might have caused her desire to move—to get away from the temptation. This didn't feel right. Her first marriage had decayed at the core before she strayed. Their marriage was solid. In the end times, even the most solid, stable things couldn't be counted on, he thought, picturing the looters at Jackie's Bikes and the unease in the courtroom. But these weren't the end times, just a down year.

His rational mind gave way again to raw emotion and he clawed at his chest as the pain grew louder and louder, and then the realization dawned that this wasn't merely emotion that felt physical. Something physical was happening.

He tried remembering the signs of strokes and heart attacks: Phantom smells? Numbness? Nothing lined up with what he now felt. The skin under his wedding ring felt engorged with blood. Instinct led him to remove the band while he still could—taking a little skin off in the process. He attempted to scream for Catarina but the sound got stuck in his throat. The searing pain that birthed in his chest radiated outward like slow-moving lava. His thoughts were scattered, fragmented, only coalescing long enough to form *Guess that's all the adventuring I get* before losing all coherence.

The pain peaked and was followed by immense relief that slowly radiated from the front of his body to the back, with the searing continuing apace until the wave reached it. His nerves told his brain that his body now had four arms, four legs, two cocks—possibilities his rational mind rejected. Then these conflicting messages and the pain was gone, and replaced with a feeling that he'd been emptied and diminished.

Breathing rapidly, covered in sweat, feeling he'd survived something immense; his relief was slowly replaced with urgent hunger. Instinctively, he searched for Catarina's waist before recalling that she was asleep on the couch. He was alarmed to find an unfamiliar waist in her spot. Simultaneously, another hand touched his own waist.

Leonard rolled to the floor, stood and stared across the bed. The other person did the same. Adrenaline rushed through him and his fists clenched. His counterpart drew back an elbow, prepared to punch if the other charged. Looking down, Leonard saw he'd instinctively done the same. They were both nude though he'd gone to bed wearing a shirt.

"Dean?" they simultaneously asked in an unconvinced tone. Even in the dim light, the familiar intruder was not his brother: too thin, too off. His broken nose and potbelly were missing. Instead, the man was the mirror image of himself, including the fading black eye and bruises. These faded away as they watched, both their eyes falling to the tattered shirt on the bed halfway between them, and then on other man's clenched hand. It unclenched, revealing the wedding ring.

Leonard slowly rotated around the bed to get a closer look, as the counterpart went in the opposite direction. At first each movement they made was the same, then slightly different, then increasingly distinct. The experience was like watching a mirror where the reflected image was slowly falling out of harmony, then a choreographed but choppy dance followed. They finally broke out of synchronization when they circled the bed and his counterpart reached the headboard and wall, and had no further to go. From there, the spell was broken and they moved differently.

A sharp pain hit Leonard's stomach and he collapsed forward onto the bed. The pain was foreign, indescribable, fogging his mind until the realization slowly arrived that he was experiencing extreme hunger. The other man was also doubled on the bed, also clutching his stomach.

The impossible idea entered that his body had just duplicated.

Without taking eyes off his other version—thoughts foggy from the hunger, exhaustion, and shock—a primal thought flashed through him that this other version might attack. His hand went up protectively, and his counterpart’s hand did the same. His counterpart was running the same calculation.

He gave and received a quizzical look. They both nodded and agreed wordlessly that they should eat.

Stepping out of the bedroom first, he spotted Catarina sleeping on the couch. His love for her felt so strong the emotion reached the edge of madness. Then he had a sensation of having just lost half of her, as though her love was a physical item he’d have to share. *She might leave us both.* He became afraid to wake her, and that she might respond with disgust or fear. Who could predict a lover’s response to the impossible? Had this happened before? Did people know it happened?

In an odd, unexpectedly comforting gesture, the Leonard behind him reached out and held his hand, and like this they walked to the kitchen and scavenged, collecting food as quietly as they could on the kitchen counter. They ate animalistically, with no utensils or napkins or speaking. Their memories flashed back to a childhood of competing for ice cream with Dean. Here, they divvied evenly and fairly.

Once they’d both worked their way through the dinner leftovers, peanut butter on bread, several raw eggs from a cup, and multiple glasses of water, they slowed. Non-primitive thoughts returned. For what he sensed would be the only time, they were able to have a kind of near conversation in thoughts and nonverbal reactions. This telepathic ability was squandered at first, mostly revolving around how good food tasted. Then they thought of what they would need to split: the job they could now each do every other week and explore other interests (bike shop?), clothes they’d share (they’d wear out faster). Friends were easily shareable. But some things weren’t divisible. Catarina was still sleeping.

*I guess we can't kill each other*, he thought. *She wouldn't like that*. His double watched him looking at her. He thought how they would do anything not to lose her. Then he thought (and felt the thought originate from his double, not his own mind, though this sensation never repeated itself) *We'll play fair*. Better to work together with a united front—a better chance of not freaking her out.

They recounted all they'd done to build their love: participated in adultery, adjusted dreams, learned to wait (for her to leave her husband, to return in workaholic periods, to be ready for children). She must love him a lot, to do that. This was just one more thing.

Together, drunk on food, he and his double waited for Catarina to wake. *Come*, he thought as his duplicate probably thought the same, *let's go back to bed. Our wife will find us both profoundly creepy if she sees us here watching her sleep*.

### Chapter Three

On Saturday, July 16, 1977, Catarina woke on the couch and heard Leonard speaking in the bedroom. The morning was already hot and clammy. She blinked repeatedly to clear her head.

She went on high alert at the state of the kitchen: dish containers, tin cans and plastic food wrapping were strewn around the sink. Cabinets were open and emptied. A rice bag had been torn; uncooked grains scattered on the floor. How had she not woken? Nothing outside the kitchen looked out of place and the door bolt was still locked.

In the bedroom, Leonard was still speaking in a low tone. She listened for a second voice but none came. She knocked lightly and Leonard's voice went silent. Then, he said, "Come in."

She slowly opened the door. Two identical Leonards sat cross-legged on the bed, tired-looking and frighteningly gaunt. She screamed soundlessly as she backed out of the room. Then she heard herself screaming audibly. She pulled the door shut with a slam, then slid down and sat with her back to the doorframe.

Each man had been her husband exactly. One must be a fraud or a devil.

"Cat?" they said from behind the door. "Cat?"

She stood, opened the door again. She crawled onto the bed, touching the cheek of the Leonard on the right. With her other hand she touched the second Leonard's. Wildness was in their eyes. She was drawn to comfort them and repulsed by the sight. She swallowed. "How?"

"I don't know," one Leonard said. "I—we had a nightmare."

She retreated to the opposite edge of the bed.

"Which one of you is Leonard? Which is my husband, Leonard?"

They shook their heads. "We had the same nightmare, like a searing pain. Then we woke up like this, starving."

She covered her mouth and studied their faces. Silent and unshaven, they were both him.

“Say more,” she said. Her hands grew shaky.

The two Leonards looked at each other, then to her. They shook their heads. One said, “We woke and reacted the same way, doing the same movements, the same heavy hunger. Everything the same. For a few hours, we could have a rough conversation using only our thoughts because when we thought something, we knew the other had the same thoughts.” He offered this last detail with boy-ish excitement. “Then the exhaustion.”

This all felt unhelpful. She touched the left one’s hand. “Where was our first kiss?” she asked.

“Right after we crossed the Brooklyn Bridge,” he said.

“What am I most excited about at work right now?” she asked the other.

Her fear that he was a disguised devil built during his silence. “You’re drafting an immigration manual for the bar association that will help poor defendants navigate the courts. It’ll be in English and Spanish.”

“Okay,” she said, feeling a wild mix of relief and concern. Both answers were correct. Both men became her husband again. “We’ll figure it out. We’ll be fine.” She put on her courtroom smile. Her hands were shaking, so she clasped them together. The panic spread through her body, but she kept this from her expression. “We should get you both to a doctor.”

The Leonards’ shoulders visibly relaxed. Catarina looked away as one of them climbed from the bed. With two of them present, his nudity seemed improper.

“Okay,” she said, “okay.” She looked fully at the one standing nude. “Here’s what we do. We’ll go to the clinic on 125th—it’s five dollars and they won’t ask too many questions. Just take physicals to make sure you’re okay. You both look gaunt.”

“The public clinic?” he said with unexpected elitism.

“Yes. They have some great doctors, and they can at least tell you if everything else is normal,” she said. The standing Leonard was rubbing his arm, staring out their window. “You should get dressed,” she said, trying to keep a calm exterior.

They obeyed. “Was the couch okay?” one asked while dressing.

“What?” she said. “Oh. Fine.”

She collected her purse, her shoes.

“Ready?” she asked. They looked like were negotiating something between them.

“We only have one pair of glasses,” one said. “Not a big deal.” They were slightly nearsighted. They resolved it for now by neither wearing glasses.

Going down the stairs, they moving gingerly and slowly, using the banister. Even so, they winced each step.

“Are you in pain?” she asked, positioning herself to help them.

“Everything’s a little tender, but going down stairs is worse,” one said.

“It’s like the ache you feel the day after a marathon,” the other added.

When they reached the street, she held their hands awkwardly as they walked to the clinic. Typically, he walked to her left, so her right hand felt unnatural holding him. Glass cracked under their feet. Rats were brazenly sorting through the piles of garbage bags. The block had a burnt, fetid smell. The corner pawnshop’s door and windows were boarded up. The plywood boarding was already graffitied with hearts containing money symbols.

“It’s okay,” the Leonard to the left said. He released her hand and touched her back gently to indicate they should walk faster.

They passed a gas station that looked like the places impacted by the riots, but was in fact untouched, protected by prior abandonment. The only clue was that signs still offered pre-oil-crisis prices of 40 cents a gallon.

Outside the clinic, men were carrying bedding and makeshift frames into the recreation center across the street, pulling them from vans. One shouted from the truck's flatbed, "How many beds left?" He wore a loud purple dress shirt with the sleeves rolled up, as if he'd been headed to church when he was offered a day's work.

"Twenty to the gymnasium," another shouted back.

"Is the clinic open?" Catarina asked the man in the truck. The front looked abandoned, a window cracked and door dangling off its hinge.

"Yes, ma'am. We're helping to set up extra beds for them as we speak," said the man in the purple shirt.

"Thanks," she said.

They stepped past the broken door. She could tell one of the Leonards was considering if he could fix it as he walked past it.

Catarina went to the intake desk with a Leonard on either side. A woman with tortoiseshell glasses was behind the counter. About a dozen names were ahead of them on the sign-in list. On the intake sheet, Catarina wrote *Leonard Galletti* twice, separated by a comma, then looked around.

The waiting room was overfilled with beaten-down men, some young enough to have their mothers along. One man gave off a constant low moan. Glass shards were embedded in his wrist; he'd been late to the looting party. The scene recalled the dazed looks at the courthouse days before, except these folks were lucky enough to avoid the jail or the hospital.

"Oh my," Catarina said.

"You should have been here Wednesday," said the intake woman. "Do you know how many pills I've had to crush preparing prescriptions in the dark? That's usually the nurses' job. We'll be sorting paperwork for weeks." She gestured to stacks of forms. A teletype machine was producing

occasional messages on an endless roll of paper that flowed down to the ground. A typewriter was covered in unfilled pill containers.

“We’ve got an emergency,” the Leonard to her right said. “I think.”

“Everyone here’s got an emergency,” the intake woman said. “Most people are sure of it. What’s your issue?”

“I duplicated,” both Leonards said simultaneously.

The woman did a doubletake, looking up at the two Leonards. Catarina, standing in the middle, squeezed their hands as if to confirm that they were both hers.

“You what?” the intake woman asked.

“Duplicated,” the Leonard to the left said.

“You dup—” the woman cut herself off, and sighed. Her surprise faded. “As in split into two people?”

“Yes, there was one of us, and then there were two.”

“*Right.* Any other symptoms?”

“No, well.” One looked at the other.

“When we woke up,” the other said, “we were very, very hungry. Hungrier than we’ve ever been. And then like an extreme version of the soreness you get the day after exercising.”

“Hungry—got it. But then you ate and you’re fine now? You’re not looking for food here?”

“We ate, and we’re fine now other than the muscle soreness.” He looked at the other Leonard, who nodded in agreement.

“You two have insurance?” the woman asked.

“Yes, but we have one card,” the Leonard to Catarina’s right said. Both Leonards shuffled through their pockets, the successful one handing over their driver’s license and insurance card.

“Only one of you has identification?” she asked.

“Well, we both do, but it’s the same identification,” the other Leonard said.

“You the wife?” she asked.

“Yes,” Catarina said.

“Lovely. This is true?”

“Yes.”

A pause followed during which the intake woman seemed to debate whether to kick them out. Her eyes lingered on Catarina, who nodded again to affirm this was real.

The patient with glass shards moaned in the waiting room, and the intake woman pointed to him. “Claims he hurt himself breaking into his own house. Forgot his keys the day after the riots. Unlucky.”

“Lots of people trying to break into their own homes where I work too,” Catarina said.

“And unlucky fires.”

“You work at a hospital?”

“Courthouse.”

“Huh. Alright, your men are lucky you’re here to vouch and I can’t see a scam angle, or I’d have kicked them right out,” the woman said. “Even as things are, any other week and I’d have a lot more questions. But this week I’ve had gunshots, burns, lost teeth, broken ribs, moms looking for their kids, and every kind of crazy. So, sure, why not? We’ll treat one of you as uninsured; just give me the five dollars for the visit. We’ll figure out the rest later. Fill this out.” She handed them two forms. She disappeared briefly into a back room. When she returned, she said, “Okay, once you fill out the forms you two can go right in.”

In the waiting room, the wallpaper behind the pew-like benches was worn away by the oil from the many resting heads who’d waited to be seen or for loved ones to return.

The two Leonards sat on either side of her, filling out forms and simultaneously turning the pages. She noted that, unless unprecedented forgetfulness had occurred, they had agreed without her knowing that neither would wear their wedding ring. She fingered her own.

“What’s your—” they both started, then looked at each other. One nodded to the second. “Cat, what’s your social security number?” the other finished. She told them.

They gave Catarina their carbon copies at the same time and went in without her to the next room. Their yellow carbon-marked sheets had only minor differences in where words were placed and the curve of the letters.

“Hey, are you guys for real?” the woman nearest to her asked. “Is that your husband? Did your husband really duplicate?”

“Yes,” Catarina said, not thinking.

The woman looked straight forward and put her hands on her purse. “Shit, I know what I would do if I had two husbands.”

Catarina tensed. “Right,” she said, looking intently at the carbon copies. Inside, she felt overwhelmed. What steps to take, paperwork to be updated—and then she considered her job. Everyone would have the same thought as this woman next to her, which meant Catarina’s career might be in jeopardy. She was surrounded by old-fashioned men with little patience for unorthodoxy. She’d long feared her colleagues would see through Leonard’s suit to the bohemian underneath, and then see her own true character, two imposters pretending to belong in the professional class.

An older nurse came through the waiting room, blood on her shoes and lower pants, smoking a cigarette. She sat outside on the stoop, looking indifferently at the world. She should have been a doctor, Catarina thought, like Catarina’s grandmother should have been a lawyer, not a legal assistant. Catarina wanted to ask the nurse why she would stay in this city, but thought if this woman

could make it, maybe she could too. An unexpected wave of almost painful aching love for her husband crested in her.

This emotion was interrupted by the entrance of several uniformed policemen, one with a bloodied face from a skull wound. This entrance created a nervous air, with the looters and officers glancing at each other. Catarina didn't recognize them, but they could still know her. She grew nervous that someone would mention why she was there or they'd come speak with her, and she instinctually didn't want them knowing her business.

In the public mind, gossiping was womanly but everybody did it; women just bore the worst consequences. In Catarina's law school cohort of twenty women, one classmate slept with a married law professor and had gotten the coveted "A" in his class. An affair was something her more liberal classmates could perhaps have handled but the perception that this classmate had benefited in a class graded on a curve was unforgivable. She was left off invite lists and out of study groups, and this stigma still travelled with her after graduation.

When Catarina divorced Duncan, she was hit with own social penalty. She'd shed connections rapidly during the divorce process: college friends who sided with Duncan; wealthy friends whose lifestyles she could no longer share; and absences with no obvious reason, as though divorce were contagious. This last group included several male and female colleagues she'd expected to be above judgment about private lives, especially given that unlike Catarina's classmate, Catarina's move had sacrificed opportunity rather than helped her. She made a point of having her new name in place by her first day at the DA's office. A fresh start. But then they all eventually knew anyway; gossip carried in the air in legal circles, like any insular job.

Catarina glanced at the cops again, and decided it was okay to ask the nurse for a spare cigarette to steady herself, and position herself out of sight as they left.

“Catarina Galletti!” the intake woman shouted, startling Catarina. An officer looked around and nodded to Catarina, though it seemed more friendly gesture than recognition.

Catarina returned to the counter. “Already?” she asked.

“The opposite,” the intake woman said, “It’s backed up in there. Might be hours.”

“Hours?” Catarina asked

“You should head out.”

“I’d prefer to wait.” She said this instinctually.

“Honey, we’re an outpatient clinic. That means we’re not supposed to even have beds, and we’re definitely not staffed for this many people. But all people do during riots is fuck and fight. The hospitals will have another rush in nine and a half months in the maternity ward. I see from your address here that you live nearby. What do you say you go home and take a shower, come back and see them? You look like shit and my waiting room is full.”

Catarina sighed and look back into the waiting room of cops and vandals; her will flagged.

“They’ll probably be hungry again when they get out,” the intake woman said more softly.

“You can bring them something.”

\* \* \*

After returning to the apartment, Catarina called Joyce, a friend from Barnard College and a close confidant during Catarina’s affair with Leonard. Joyce was now a research psychiatrist in Philadelphia. She focused on toxins and childhood development, but was the only scientist Catarina knew.

“Duplication is impossible,” Joyce said immediately. “Biology doesn’t work that way. I mean, cells split all the time, but complex organs are too sophisticated. The simplest explanation is that it’s Leonard and his twin tormenting you with an elaborate prank. You guys prank each other sometimes, right?”

“I don’t prank people.”

“The thing where you sewed that boy’s gown shut?” Catarina’s freshman year at Barnard, she’d sewn shut the arm of a special gown the valedictorian got to put on the graduation stage. After their fun watching their confused friend try unsuccessfully to put the gown on, they gave him an unaltered one.

“God Joyce, that? He deserved it, the pompous fool. Anyway, that was Wilson’s influence,” Catarina said, with the odd sensation of an old friend assuming that you continued a behavior from when you knew them better. Catarina had crushed on Wilson before Duncan, while she was still overweight and invisible in particular ways to men. She’d hung out with Wilson constantly and even fooled around in secret, but they’d never acknowledged their feelings, let alone openly dated. Wilson had loved pranks and she’d loved him. She missed pranks, but Leonard didn’t have that sort of humor. “Anyway, Leonard’s tone this morning was wrong for a joke. I know my husband, and the two of them are both *him*. They woke up starving, and look so different after just one night, fainter, gaunter, like he lost his fat. But they’re him. I just took them to the clinic.”

“Right. Wow. I, uh. Okay, okay, if it happened, if it’s not a prank. Let me think.” Joyce’s tone shifted from casual to concerned—she still didn’t seem to believe the split was real, but now understood that Catarina was serious.

“I’m not imagining things,” Catarina said.

“I see, I see. Listen, let’s do the options,” Joyce said. “So there’s cloning, but no one has cloned anything more complex than a tadpole. Even if we could clone a human, it would have to be done when he’s just born and—”

“He’s not a clone, unless you can clone memories. They both know me.”

“These are just ideas. I’m a psychiatrist, not a genetics expert.”

“And I’m a prosecutor, not a divorce lawyer, but you asked me about *that*. You’re who I know and trust.”

Joyce clicked her tongue, palatably unconvinced this was real, but worried Catarina believed it. “Let me research a little, and come up to New York tomorrow. Trains should be running back to normal by tomorrow. We’ll figure it out together. Just don’t do anything rash ‘til I get there. Don’t tell many people.”

“I agree. Let’s use affair rules here, okay?”

“Affair rules? Is that what we’re calling them? Okay, I’ll keep it close.”

Joyce’s sigh in response just before hanging up sounded relieved.

Unable to hit the sweet spot on the tricky shower dial, Catarina opted for a cold shower rather than a scalding one. Only then, with the bathroom door latched and the shower on, did she allow herself to cry. “It’s not going to work. It’s not going to work,” she said to herself. But maybe that was stupid. He wasn’t dead. There were just two of him.

She gripped the rusted porcelain side of the tub and stabilized, breathing in and out. The cold water felt good against her sweaty skin. A recent memory resurfaced of longing for Leonard to press against her, just before he collapsed, of the woman in the clinic waiting room saying “Shit, I know what I would do if I had two husbands.” Desire flared up unexpectedly, but Catarina roughly turned off the metal water knob and tried to suppress her arousal.

The phone rang as she came out of the shower.

“Hello,” said a female voice.

“Joyce?” Catarina asked.

“Alice.”

“Of course, Alice. I’m just expecting a call. How are you?”

“Fine, fine. Wanted to see how you guys were weathering.”

“You’re so sweet for checking in. We’re fine. I got stuck in the subway and Leo was a little banged up protecting the bike shop where Dean works, but we’re fine now. You?”

“Oh that’s so scary. I got home before anything happened, so I just hunkered down with a friend up the block. I won’t hold up the phone line if you’re expecting a call, but is Leonard coming into work Monday?”

“Why?”

“Oh nothing. Just, he could drop his art piece off at my school then? The Rodin hands? People could still use the show, right? After a week like this.” Alice taught dance at a grade school on Pearl Street, a few blocks from Leonard’s firm. She also hosted parties full of amateur music, art, dance and readings. Catarina often felt out of place, but hip for having gone.

“Definitely. I’ll remind him. I’m looking forward to it.”

Catarina’s eyes lingered on the sculpture in their living room. The design was inspired by Rodin’s Cathedral and the mannequin hand Catarina used to store rings. He’d twisted metal from bike spokes to create two hands emerging from driftwood that reached for each other, the empty space between them immovable and insurmountable. One hand had a metal wedding band and the other did not. During their affair, Leonard wouldn’t touch Catarina until her ring was off, making its removal an act of vulnerability.

Catarina had to keep a numb distance while looking at the sculpture or else the disorientation she felt back then resurfaced. Looking back was more difficult for her than him; the experience more traumatic and complex. She’d loved her first husband even after learning that he’d been unfaithful. Then she’d also loved Leonard, and had become a cheater herself. For a time, she told confidants that she *loved* Duncan but was *in love* with Leonard. Then, after she’d allowed those two relationships to overlap for too long, she stopped trying to measure the two forms of love against each other. Nobody had behaved especially admirably, including herself. Her previously

devout Catholic faith had been permanently shaken, even if she hadn't totally lapsed. Nothing about the business felt worthy of art.

Beyond evoking the affair mess, Leonard's connection to art discomfited her. Unlike their shared fluency in the law, during art conversations she could get a bit lost despite trying to follow. She often found herself pretending to know more than she did. Leonard was always far more at ease in those crowds, even when he didn't know much more than her about a particular artist or kind of art. Leonard was having fun without her, even when she was also present. So, something was threatening about that aspect of him growing too large in his life, an unpredictable path that she couldn't follow fully.

Another reason to have the sculpture gone already. Perhaps Alice could keep it after the show. But then jealous anger surfaced. Alice had instigated his sculpting and guided his process, forging a creative bond. He'd given himself over to a project that Catarina didn't have a way into, despite it relating to their shared past. The end result was artwork that resonated with Leonard and Alice, but left Catarina cold. Alice shouldn't get to keep it.

The phone rang again.

"You're not going to believe what I found," Joyce said.

"Already?" Catarina asked.

"Already. A colleague from work knows all about this. Have you heard of the Barren Brothers? The freakshow on the Coney Island boardwalk?"

"Sounds familiar."

"Yeah, well, their whole act is that they're duplicates. Most people assume they're twins doing an act, but others think they're telling the truth, and there's footage to prove it. Plenty of other cases exist too, maybe even from this blackout. I'm going to look into it more. I just wanted you to know."

“Thanks. I really appreciate it. You’re still coming?” she said, feeling relieved that other cases existed, that Joyce no longer thought she was going crazy, and delayed irritation at Joyce’s doubt.

“Eventually. Maybe not tomorrow if I’m doing more research. Affair rules.”

After the call, Catarina curled up on the couch. During Catarina’s affair with Leonard, Joyce—who had an infidelity of her own—had written Catarina with memorable advice: “Have one or two good confidants. Anything more, and things are bound to get ugly. If you stay with Duncan and too many people know, he will eventually find out. If you leave Duncan and go with Leonard, you will be forever branded a cheater and Leonard will forever be known as The Guy Catarina Cheated on Her Husband With.” This advice felt relevant again. Maybe they’d tell his family but not hers. Definitely not work. The D.A.’s Office was more forgiving of corruption than sex scandals, and a female prosecutor living with two men through a process associated with freakshow acts could destroy her. Could Leonard register himself as a second person without her job finding out?

Then her thoughts softened, and she imagined the Leonards taking shifts so that she had someone on duty at all times to share her life with, a Leonard staying up with her at night while the other Leonard slept the extra sleep that Catarina didn’t need. Picturing this in action soured the fun of the idea and a protectiveness of her solitary habits surfaced. Sure, she missed him while jogging alone and when she wanted more of his company this would be great, but how often would she want more compared to when she’d need to get work done or space for her own thoughts? Would she no longer get *any* time alone? Did she really want to live with both of them in that small apartment? If one had to move out, who would it be?

The phone rang again. A weary-sounding Leonard informed her that the turnaround was quicker than expected. They were healthy. They’d be home soon.

## Chapter Four

The clinic had told the two Leonards that duplication was rare, but not unheard of. A clinician had told them she'd been exposed to the phenomenon following the Watts Riots in the '60s. Apparently duplication was more common in twins and in periods of stress. Nobody really understood how or why it happened, but the clinician was adamant that neither Leonard was an original or a copy, any more than an original cell remained following mitosis. They'd each have new, different sets of fingerprints. The clinic then proclaimed them both fine male specimens, though minor blood work would follow. They shouldn't expect long-term health problems connected to the split, but should avoid rigorous exercise for a few days, increase their caloric intake until they reached their normal weight and drink a lot of water.

"Meanwhile," Catarina said, "I keep thinking of new things we need to be careful about, who we tell, how we tell them, everything that we need to do and be careful about."

They squeezed her hands simultaneously. "We'll make it work," one promised.

She kissed one hand and then the other. "I don't think we should tell your work but perhaps one of you can go in and feel out the office to see if they could offer something to a twin with similar experience. Maybe we don't tell anyone yet except Joyce and Maddie." Maddie was Catarina's closest friend in law school and the Manhattan D.A.'s Office, and Leonard's friend from childhood. She'd introduced Leonard to Catarina.

The two Leonards nodded, but then one asked, "Wait, why do we care if people know? If it's a known phenomenon . . ."

"Leonard, that's a nice idea, but we're talking about telling people I'm living with two men."

"It's the '70's, not the '50's. People live all kinds of ways now. Look at Bowie, or anyone walking around the Village."

“You grew up sheltered from some things. You could call your parents up and tell them we were moving to a kibbutz, and they’d give their blessing so long as the kibbutz was unionized. And I admire them, but they’d never, *ever* have gotten hired where I work. Same for Bowie or Alice’s crowd. There’s a whole other world out there and I’ve seen it; where I was raised, the older generation was religious, superstitious and uncomfortable with change. Women were playing the same roles they played two thousand years ago. The Manhattan DA’s Office is like that too. While your friends were protesting Vietnam, my office was prosecuting the Columbia SDS protesters. Folks in the office are still upset McSorley’s has to allow women in the bar now. These people are old guard.”

“If that’s true—”

“It *is* true. It’s something my mother reminded me of my whole life. You don’t want to hear it.”

“I hear that, but—”

“You wouldn’t say ‘but’ if you understood, Leonard. Love, how my colleagues perceive me is more important to my success than my being good at my job. And no matter how hard I work, their approval is fragile. Living with two men, I’d go from a peer to hippie-floozy like”—she snapped her fingers—“I’d be frozen out.”

“That’s a bit over-dramatic, isn’t it? Even under traditional values, we’re married and that’s a vow you made to both of us. This is a documented thing you can prove. Your colleagues passed the bar exam; they can get their heads around evidence.”

“That’s already too complicated a counter-argument. One woman, two men, weirdness. That’s the evidence they’ll hear. Trust my instinct on this.”

They considered this but looked skeptical. The one wearing glasses removed them and placed them on the table. The other reached to his face at the same time but found no glasses there.

“This could all be taken away?” one gestured to their apartment.

“Don’t joke. People beyond this room are impacted by our decisions. You help people at your job; there’s a manual to help immigrants navigate courts that wouldn’t exist without my initiative. We send something to my mom and your brother every month. That can be taken away.”

“Fine, fine. We keep it secret, for now,” he said. The other nodded in agreement.

She sighed in relief. “Thanks.”

He continued, “*but* I really think we’re focusing on what the world is going to see, when maybe we should first be sure how we feel.”

“This will buy us time to figure that piece out,” she said.

“What do you want?” he asked. He often focused on logistics to avoid emotional conflict, and wasn’t going to let her use his tactic to dodge the point.

“Neither is the original or copy, what does that mean exactly?” Catarina asked.

“The guy we were last week, the cells he had doubled in size, then divided into identical versions. Practically speaking, neither of us is more authentically Leonard or whatever term you want to us.” She nodded. She couldn’t choose one over the other on a biological basis.

“My first thought is that I don’t know if I’m someone who can handle having two husbands, and everything that comes along with that. We’ve talked sometimes how you miss my attention when I get busy, and then I get jealous that you’ll find female attention somewhere else—multiply that by two. Are both of you willing to share a wife with another man, satisfied with not as much of me? If we don’t face it now, we’ll just be postponing a reckoning that will be even more devastating if we wait.” Adrenaline rushed through her body as she spoke. She wanted to unsay everything as panic filled their eyes.

“No, no, no,” one Leonard said. Silence followed, and an anxiety flooded in that she’d just provoked them both to consider leaving her.

“We know this is something you didn’t ask for,” the other said after the pause, his voice serious and focused. “It’s a lot to absorb. Everything just feels heightened. Unstable. Let’s not make decisions in a rush.”

“Maybe you’re right. This just happened. This morning I woke up thinking you might be possessed by a demon and it’s been a rollercoaster of a day.” An ambulance went by, briefly filling the room with sound and light. When it passed, she added. “We don’t have to decide anything right now.”

\* \* \*

Soon after, the two Leonards said they were going for groceries to do something normal. She asked that they act like twins if anyone saw them, realizing she should no longer hold both their hands as she had on the way to the clinic.

Alone, she brought a book to her normal spot by the window but couldn’t focus on reading. Instead, she grew more and more certain that she’d been correct that one of them would, eventually, have to leave for the sake of preserving her marriage to the other. New arguments she hadn’t made surfaced: look how small their place was! What would holidays be like? Only being near them both had made it seem like a close question.

Around five, a thunderstorm started. Summertime thunderstorms always got Leonard impassioned and full of desire. She both longed for that intimacy and wasn’t sure how she’d respond now. Or she knew: she’d reject any advance by either of them. Being with two men was not a fantasy of hers.

Despite the apparent firmness of this thought, when she left the window, she went straight to the bathroom and put on makeup. She hadn’t worn makeup until her late twenties. As a teenager, she viewed the time spent on it as unnecessary vanity, and natural beauty was true beauty—ideas

reinforced by her childhood church and, later, her friends at Barnard. Her mother never pushed makeup on Catarina, despite bonding with Catarina's sister over sharing products and techniques—another clue that Carmen saw Gabby as the pretty one and Catarina as the smart one. Catarina only eventually learned after her boss's advice that juries expected it of female prosecutors; at the same time, she switched from bulky glasses to contact lenses. She'd been hesitant, but now enjoyed makeup and could tell that Leonard liked her in makeup without saying he did. Today, she wanted to look less troubled than she felt.

She settled on a lace dress—light pink, sheer—that she'd often worn during their early courtship. It would make them less inhibited, dressing up as her younger self. In her full-length mirror, she mentally compared her current body to her younger body. Her shape was less firm, with lines on her face and neck where she had once been smooth. Still, less strain existed in her eyes, a greater contentment. Lace usually made her feel soft, sensual, vulnerable, but now she also felt like an imposter—trying to recapture a version of herself that belonged to the past.

Dressed and seated at her vanity, she became aware of a contradiction between her actions and thought: while she'd intellectually reaffirmed that only one could stay, she was dressing provocatively for them both. *Why?* She longed to connect with her husband, could think of no way to choose one over the other. Perhaps if something happened it would be giving the one who had to leave a kind of parting memory? Or would that kind of memory only make it harder when he inevitably had to leave? Perhaps she was doing mischief by giving them what they wanted temporarily so that they would see the wisdom of her suggestion in the long term: the night might be a miserable experience, and show one of them to leave for the sake of the others? Her earnest motivation alluded her, and perhaps was not a single thing.

The Leonards returned around six, their grocery bags sagging and dripping wet. At the door, they each pulled her in for a one-armed hug. Her lace clung to her skin where they had touched, wetted and sheerer still.

They put down the bags and went to the couch, one drying his head with a towel, the other staring forward blankly while the window rattled from the rain. She moved a chair from the kitchen, so she could see them both at once.

Though their smell and speech were normal, she asked, “Whiskey?”

One Leonard glanced at the other, who then produced a flask. Before taking a swig, Catarina built up a little saliva in her mouth to dull the sting of the sip. She took a second swig.

She put the flask down in the couch corner and held each of their hands. The sleeve of the pink lace dress fell down her shoulder, and she slowly put it back in place.

“I had no idea I had gray hair,” one said. “I’m not even thirty.” His eyes darted between her outfit and her eyes, distracted.

Catarina laughed. “It’s not much,” she said. “It looks handsome. Stately.” She played with his hair, then let her hand go down to his cheek. The other Leonard smiled too, though with a small pain in it. He took a drink.

“We had some thoughts on the house budget,” said the Leonard left of her.

“I don’t think I can do this,” she blurted out her bottled anxiety. “I’m going to hurt you really badly. This isn’t going to end well.”

The rain outside hit the windows hard in the silence that followed. She thought perhaps they might be about to repeat points.

“Sometimes,” the Leonard to her right said unsteadily, “I describe my fears as facts because I want someone else to say they’re not true. That’s what you’re doing. You don’t mean what you’re saying, and what you’re saying isn’t true.”

She clung to his words. “You’re right. I didn’t mean that,” she said. “We’ve been through so much. This is just one more thing.” She’d walked up to a line but couldn’t cross it, didn’t want to. Her whole body was in high alert, poised between grateful love, guilt for hurting him, fear of losing him, and a lingering sense of inevitability that she would leave one of them. She suppressed this last thought, felt with certainty only minutes ago, and instead let herself share his conviction that it would all work out. She went on her knees and gripped each of their wrists, her skin tingling at the touch.

“I’m afraid this won’t work too,” said the one leaning forward. “The first night we both had that thought. And jealousy.” He looked at the other Leonard, who nodded. “It’s natural to fear the worst when there’s a large change.”

He lifted her hand from his wrist and kissed it. The other Leonard did the same. Then each took a turn kissing her lips. She let the kisses linger, and each wanted to linger even longer. Neither showed disapproval when she kissed the other. Her longing was now in full control of her actions, crowding out any other thoughts.

She tuned the radio to a funk station. “So,” she said, returning to sit between them boldly. “you going to cook? Hmm?”

The Leonard on the left touched her side and slid his hand up towards her breast. She inched away as if bashful, but then she kissed him. The other pulled at her waist, turning her, getting his own kiss. Overwhelmed, she stood and stepped away, knocking into the chair. A sting went through her leg.

“Sorry,” one of them said.

“You’re fine,” she said, stabilizing, not wanting them to see that weakness.

She retreated to the bedroom and fell on the bed. The sheets smelled of him. The floor creaked as steps followed her in but she did not look up. Eyes closed, on her stomach, she spread her legs slowly. “You’re going to share me,” she said. “Nicely.”

“Yes,” he said, his voice close and familiar.

A metal buckle rattled as it came off. The sounds of clothes dropping followed: two belts, two pants, two shirts, and, finally, the snap of the elastic of their boxers. She denied herself the pleasure of looking, feeling guilty and wanting to punish herself for some unknown crime. Everything became blurred anyhow after one of them removed her glasses.

Then they were on her. They stripped her urgently, on the edge of being too rough—the presence of another man brought out something feral in each of them. She felt her skirt rip but said nothing. She was flipped over and wordlessly each was assigned a part of her to focus on. She felt whorish, experiencing sensations usually reserved for . . . who? Even prostitutes rarely had so much skin pressed against them at once—perhaps 42nd Street grindhouse film stars. But where those women could expect a kind of mechanical experience, she was given two men singularly in love with her. Their hands clawed her as though they wished to consume her like a sacrifice, a virgin on the stone.

Each part of her body called for her attention. She closed her eyes to focus on touch. Her face was cradled and she was kissed on her lips as she was kissed around her thigh. Fingers lubricated her asshole with her pussy’s natural wetness, preparing her ass to stretch with his fingers. She was moved to lie on top of one, facing away. He gripped her neck and took her from behind. The second positioned himself above her. She had no concept of who was who and lost herself in sensation. She prayed to God for an orgasm, then offered her soul for one—anything, any price, for the gift of an orgasm with her two Leonards just then—and when the gift was granted, she returned to her body, her thighs and hips convulsing.

The area around her vagina became ticklish and sensitive. She pushed at their chests gently. “Easy, easy, easy. I came, I just need—Don’t touch anything for a second.”

For a fearful moment, she thought they’d disobey her, but they paused and she felt safe again. Her fear felt foolish: each had her body so memorized, her limits so known, that they honored even wordless requests to stop, start or slow. She waited only long enough for her breaths to slow; then, she talked dirty again and taunted them, resolving not to let them rest or leave them alone until she had all she wanted. They were done quickly—first one, and then the other right after.

She cried—cathartic, not sorrowful tears—releasing the stress of weeks and the past 24 hours. The two of them were tender but clumsy, each behaving as he always would if she cried, pulling her close and pressing her head into his chest. Now, only one could do this, and the other laid his hand on her back then spooned her so that she was sandwiched between them. The sensation was disorienting but comforting, and she was too lost in tears to think it through. When her crying subsided, she kissed the closest neck and reached her hand back to rub the shoulder of the other.

“Was that okay? What we just did?” she asked. One responded by lightly raking her back while the other massaged the base of her neck.

The one raking her back said, “That was okay.” The other put his hand in hers and pinned it gently, which she took as agreement. “Was it okay for you?” he asked.

“Incredible,” she said. “Thank you,” she said more softly.

Were they feeling jealous of each other? A question better asked one-on-one. She repositioned so that she lay exactly between them, and the scent of them took her over and a sleepy lightheadedness followed, and a smile crept into her lips as she recalled what had happened. She imagined them each duplicating again—four of them all needing attention. All aching for her in the manner only he could ache. Her present soreness multiplied—the desperate longing reflected in

their eyes—what animals they would become, longing for her touch, longing to fill her—and then eight of them followed by sixteen—but that was too many. A room full of this man would kill her. She would have to send some away, but she couldn't bear the thought of that. She couldn't squander an ounce. She would become creative. Efficient. Send them out on tasks to make them feel useful. Only giving all parts of her on rare occasions and taking care not to awaken their passion when too many were present. She would find ways to make love that would be gentle on her. Thinking this, she looked at them—they lay awake, tense, staring at the ceiling. Ready.

“I love each of you,” she said, and waited to see what she had awakened, feeling a childish excitement.

\* \* \*

After their second session, a giddy teenage feeling tingled throughout Catarina's body. She couldn't stop smiling. Her mind went to pranks they could play as a trio, dressing them the same, oh but they probably wouldn't go for it. Then, looking to one side and the other, she thought of something else.

“I'm going to call you Arturo and you Leo,” she said. “One gets the middle name and the other gets half the first name.”

The one she called Arturo looked at her skeptically.

“Watch, it'll work. Come, Arturo,” she said, rolling over, lingering over him so he could feel her breasts, then pulling him towards the bathroom. “Sit,” she directed. Their medicine cabinet was a mess. She finally located a pair of tiny scissors, slightly rusted but functional.

She knelt and went for the mustache. He grabbed her wrist gently but firmly. “Please, please,” she said. “If we're going to do this it's too weird if I can't tell you apart. If I have a conversation with one of you, I want to keep straight who. So, you'll be Arturo and you'll look so handsome shaved, I swear.”

He rubbed her wrist with her thumb. “I love you more than I thought it was possible to love.” His gaze was intense enough that she looked away, felt smothered, felt his duplicate waiting in the bedroom with equal fervor. Perhaps she was being greedy and their emotions would exhaust her. She swallowed her concerns and gave him a broad smile.

“I know you do,” she said. “And now this woman you love so much wants to shave your moustache. Let me.”

His fingers moved down her arm, occasionally gripping it tightly, then reached her elbow, lingered there until they drifted to her hip and squeezed, then touched his knuckles to her groin, rubbing until she gasped, then finally rested on the side of the toilet seat. She froze in place as he did all this, her hands remaining at her sides, letting him take her in, feeling a mild, somehow-deserved humiliation.

Finally, he nodded.

“Don’t move for a second, I don’t want to cut you,” she said. She moved slowly, cutting the mustache with the tiny scissors, then lathered shaving cream and cleaned it with the razor.

She followed Arturo’s glance behind her. Leo was watching from the doorway. “It looks good,” he said.

“Don’t get jealous,” Catarina said. “It’s just you.”

## Chapter Five

On Monday morning, the newly-renamed duplicates, Leo and Arturo, began their pre-work rituals only to realize they couldn't both go in. Such a move would cause exactly the kind of scandal Catarina wanted to avoid. Anyhow, immigration work couldn't be split neatly and, in any event, long-term they couldn't afford to split one salary. The trio decided that Arturo would remain behind that day while Leo went to work. The plan was that he'd feel out whether Capra & Cipriani LLP could support another attorney, and go from there. Arturo was chosen to stay home because of his new look and name.

The process felt frighteningly arbitrary for a decision that would likely lead to Arturo losing his job—Capra & Cipriani LLP likely didn't need more attorneys given the recession. The decision set off a chaotic swirl of concern that he was the one who would be kicked out if this new arrangement failed. He should have argued that they needed to balance who bore the brunt of the adjustments, but the conversation was over before he grasped the impact. His fate was sealed by a casual five-minute discussion held minutes after waking up.

Leo and Arturo exchanged a look as Catarina showered. Arturo studied his mustached duplicate to see how he felt but couldn't read him. Arturo resisted the temptation to simply close his eyes and focus on what he would think, because he wanted to get better at reading his counterpart's face.

Catarina returned from the shower humming lightly, though moving with a purpose to get out on time. Leo went to shower.

“What will you do today?” She touched his shoulder on her way to her vanity. He resisted the urge to pull her to him.

“I was going to tell Dean, then probably swim.” They both often exercised their stress away.

Dressed and ready, she sat next to him. Her eyes seemed full of words. “What’s going on inside of you?” he asked.

“My head’s spinning. And I know you’re watching for signs of how I’ll handle this going forward, and that you must be confused. I’m worried that whatever we say now has the potential to leave lasting, if not permanent, marks on our marriage. So I’m trying to speak carefully and say less until I’m sure of what I want to say. For now, is it enough to know that I love you both equally, and it doesn’t matter who stays home, who works, who has what name?”

He nodded and looked down. Catarina’s reassurance that who continued working didn’t matter made him suspect otherwise. How could he use his unemployed status to his advantage? Could he better develop a part of him she admired?

“Hey,” she said, lifting his chin back up, touched his clean upper lip, kissed him, tugged at his lip with her teeth. He nodded with more conviction.

“We’re lucky we had a strong foundation,” he said hopefully.

She nodded. “Wouldn’t want to go through this with anyone else,” she said. “Send Dean my love!”

His duplicate returned from the shower. A few minutes later, Leo and Catarina left for the subway together.

The last time Arturo had had nowhere to be during a workday had been years ago, playing hooky from school. Conceivably, he’d *never* see his colleagues again if they kept the duplication secret. *Forget that*, he thought. He resolved not to support that level of secrecy. He’d give her a week or so to adjust, then he’d need to inform Social Security and the New York Bar Association so he could apply for new legal jobs. Would they assign him a new SSN and Bar number, or would they slip an ‘A’ and ‘B’ at the end of Leo and Arturo’s existing identification?

He lay in bed for a long time. Slowly a sense of limitless possibility emerged. He was free to do anything. He'd been at Capra & Cipriani longer than he'd ever expected. It was never his dream job.

He went to Wagner, a public pool between their apartment and the East River. It had just reopened post-blackout and was full of black and Hispanic kids on summer break, looked after by mothers or grandparents. The space felt untouched by the riots and turmoil.

Arturo was the only one doing laps. He pushed himself, wanting to feel physical exhaustion, but the exercise unloosened a thought: *She won't keep us both*. A wave of panic forced him to the pool's edge, heaving for breath. He dunked his head in the pool to disguise his tears from the children around him. Managing uncertainty had been the hardest thing during the affair and would be harder now.

He picked up the hands sculpture to bring to Alice, then biked to Dean's, hair still wet with chlorine and humidity. Rats were out in force but the streets were otherwise empty through Spanish Harlem—almost like an abandoned movie set of derelict New York. Most shops were still boarded up. Someone had graffitied, *Nixon said "don't worry"* and chalk body outlines. In Central Park, the City burst back to life: retirees walking, floating sailboats, and endless groups of young couples out on picnics, sunbathing, and reading.

Images of the night before flashed through Arturo's mind as he biked past Times Square skin-shops and early-shift prostitutes. Had Catarina picked up that he had flinched away each time he'd touched Leo's skin, and tried sometimes awkwardly not to encounter the other until they became too caught up with the heat of the moment? Touching Leo didn't instill repulsion or pleasure so much as feel weird. A discomfiting out-of-placeness. Something akin to watching your fingers touch your own numb limb that had fallen asleep: your brain expects messages from both

directions. The sensation wasn't exactly like that, only a dulled version because Arturo's unconscious knew Leo wasn't *him* any longer, but sensed something more *him* than other humans.

Yet, something about relationship stress increased his libido, and that had overridden his aversions. Even now, biking, he was still so charged up that all the women he passed emitted an erotic glow. Male friends had told him that they'd imagine having sex with attractive women they'd see on the subway, but Arturo typically found this too impersonal; he usually needed some reciprocal emotional connection to even fantasize. This wasn't to say he only imagined Catarina in his private erotic thoughts. Sometimes he imagined improbable storyboards with close female friends. Maybe Catarina sensed this secret habit, which would explain why Catarina teased him about his lunches with Alice. Though perhaps that was something else: even if the lunches were innocent, his courtship with Catarina had also begun with innocent lunches.

Of course, the District Attorney's office was overwhelmingly male, so any colleague she mentioned was likely a man. Like Eddie Fernandez, a smooth, tall Cuban prosecutor whose wealthy parents had fled Castro. Despite being raised in another country, his affluent ways recalled those of Catarina's first husband: the extravagant watch; the refusal to use subways; the discussion in front of waitstaff as if they had no ears; the habit of revealing a cigar, explaining its rare origin, then making a show of lighting it. Both Eddie and Duncan play-acted as the old, successful men they'd inevitably become. At a Hispanic Bar event, Leonard watched Eddie bring Catarina a gin-and-tonic unrequested. "The waiter uses fresh mint," he'd said, as though this explained his boldness. She'd said, "Thank you, Eddie. I'll get my own. Have you met my husband? Leonard, Eddie." Eddie had given Leonard a foul look then a false smile. On the subway home, Leonard asked how Eddie knew she liked gin-and-tonics. Catarina said Eddie had seen her drink plenty of times at these things. He'd pointed out how drinking brought the flirt out in her. She'd said indignantly, "Please Leo, if I ever cheat on you, I promise it won't be Eddie Fernandez. He's as slimy as they come." The whole

episode suggested that Catarina was a faithful wife, but could find another Duncan with ease if she ever tired of the economic struggle paired with Leonard's specific flaws.

The stairs of Dean's apartment building were unsteady, but Arturo still took the steps three at a time. Arturo knocked on the door without any response. He'd called ahead; Dean was home and the bikeshop would be closed until the riot's damages to the shop were repaired. Arturo knocked harder.

"It's unlocked!" Dean finally shouted.

The apartment reflected Dean's preference for objects over people. Scattered around were transistor radios, speakers and TVs with their guts dangling out, even the bike shop's cash register, which had taken riot damage—all were in the queue to be repaired. Next to the entrance was a jar of Canadian nickels like they used to have at the squat for tricking the subway turnstiles.

Dean was lying on the floor of his living room, moaning.

"No, no," Dean said as Arturo rushed to him, "I'm fine. My back is just hurting a bit and I was listening to the piano downstairs but they just stopped. Cooler down here too. You can turn on the fan, but leave off the light."

Arturo left the fan alone for the sake of Dean's electric bill, and sat by Dean. He wondered whether Dean was actually on the floor for no reason and so was making up the downstairs music. "You okay?"

"Yeah, fine. Fun night last night, but I'm still about 20% whiskey right now and a little light sensitive. Can't tell if I'm sweating from that or the heat."

"It's definitely hot," Arturo said, gesturing to his wet pits. After several days around his duplicate, his twin's contrasting appearance stood out. Dean had broken his nose playing baseball; he had thicker eyebrows and a slight paunch. He often let his hair, currently shaved, grow into an unruly mane only to be chopped off again. Bike maintenance gave him strong arms and hands while

the rest of his body was left to waste. He loved bikes as puzzles and objects, but took the subway to work.

Dean listened, silently, arm over his eyes, as Arturo reported what had happened. When Dean got fidgety, Arturo held his ankle to still him.

“That’s a drag,” Dean said, then he squinted, tapped Arturo with his toes. “Hey, so, are you, like, the duplicate or the original?”

“Docs said there’s no original. I don’t feel like a copy, and the other Leonard feels the same. You seem really relaxed about this.”

“I did a report on it in junior high. Barren Brothers, all that. Mrs. Weiner recommended it because I had a twin. Always figured this day would come. Does being a twin make it feel less weird? Like because you’ve had practice looking at yourself?”

“Sort of.” Arturo nodded.

“Guess we don’t look as alike as in the old days. Got to bike more.”

“Remember anything else from your report?”

Dean shook his head. “I was thirteen.” He stretched out his back, arching, “Are there side effects? Any strange dreams?”

“I’ve always had strange dreams.”

“Trick question—I wanted to make sure you were you.”

“I’m pretty sure I lost my job. They’re not going to need us both.”

“No shit!” Dean said, then pinched at a splinter in the floor. “Good for you. You hated that job.”

“It was just what needed to be done to get to the next step, so we don’t starve.”

“You always spoiled Cat.” He sat up abruptly. “Come work at the bike shop!”

“I’d love that. But I’m more focused on another problem. Hey, do you have any beer?” Arturo asked. Dean pointed to the fridge and Arturo grabbed a can, opened it, took a long sip. “There’s only one Catarina.”

Dean’s face tightened. He laid back down and covered his eyes with his arm again. “She kicked you out?”

“Talked around it. I don’t know how close she was, but now she’s acting a little fake normal. She doesn’t want us to let many people know or terrible things will happen.”

“Like?”

“Work will ostracize or fire her. With all the layoffs going on already I guess that’s possible they’d let the women with two husbands go. And she’s scared of her parents flipping out.”

“You’re not doing anything illegal. Wait, shit, maybe you are. What are the polyandry laws in New York?”

“I don’t know. Would those laws apply? Anyway, people aren’t investigating her private life.” Arturo scratched his neck. “I’m more afraid for the marriage.”

“She’s always been old-school in some ways. Near the counterculture but not in it. You know, going to Alice’s parties but not snorting anything in the bathroom, or really cutting loose. I can’t see her leaving you though. You two will figure it out,” Dean said.

“Three,” Arturo corrected.

“Three. Right. With everything so fucked in this city, having two husbands doesn’t seem like that big a deal. Fuck the DA’s Office if they start giving her the business about it. Seriously, turn on the fan if you like. I haven’t paid the electric bill in months. Nobody cares.”

Arturo just patted Dean’s ankle in response. As if on cue, the piano started downstairs again, vibrating through the floorboards. “Ahhh, Sibelius,” Dean sighed. Arturo was relieved that Dean

hadn't lied about why he was on the floor. Dean self-medicated by obsessing over gears during the day and late nights drinking in Harlem jazz bars. During down time, he didn't know how to be.

“Hey,” Dean wiped sweat from his forehead. “Maybe I could skip town and you could pretend to be me.”

“Don't joke.”

He lit a cigarette and smoked from the floor. “Who's joking?” He inhaled and exhaled again. Dean looked at Arturo. “Thing is, I'd miss you. And the bike shop and mom, and I guess our old man too. Yeah, you'll need another plan.”

\* \* \*

The Manhattan D.A.'s Office consisted of about 200 attorneys that operated within a hierarchy of mini-fiefdoms. District Attorney Steward “Stewy” Cromwell perched at the top. Below him were several deputy district attorneys such as O'Donnell. Each oversaw about a dozen assistant district attorneys like Catarina. The assistant district attorneys actually prosecuted the cases.

When Catarina was hired, she discovered an organization frighteningly outdated and out-of-touch. She had no phone and had to work in an open office called the bullpen with other attorneys and paralegals. Different lawyers handled every step of the criminal process and the case assignments from the deputies occurred randomly, without regard to skills or suitability.

Catarina's first few months on the job, the whistleblower police officer Frank Serpico was shot on duty. Fellow officers refused to call for help—bringing a national spotlight on NYPD corruption. This negative attention grew worse after an internal investigation by the Knapp Commission confirmed widespread evidence of police criminality, including officers taking bribes and shaking down criminals instead of arresting them. During Christmas weekend Catarina's third year prosecuting, a film about Serpico's whistleblowing efforts was the number one movie in

America. Cumulatively, this left Catarina simultaneously defensive of her office's integrity at holiday dinners and suspicious of the evidence provided by NYPD officers that she had to present in court.

By 1977, about 600 murders happened in the Manhattan DA's jurisdiction each year, and the number was steadily inching upward. The District Attorney before Stewy, Oliver Brennan, had been installed by Tammany Hall in the forties and spent the sixties prosecuting Catarina's classmates at Columbia who were war-protestors rather than developing sophistication or expertise to combat rising crime. During Catarina's third year in the DA's office, Brennan was re-elected to a ninth term, but died at his desk weeks after being sworn in.

Stewy Cromwell replaced Brennan at a time when the city had no money. He blew through his first annual budget within six months.

Nonetheless, Catarina received her own phone and a shared office with her friend Maddie. Heavysset, blunt, and uncommonly smart, Maddie could come off as arrogant or insensitive. If you could see beyond that, she was also big-hearted and idealistic. As a kid, Maddie's mother had needed to warn Maddie not to tell her peers that she was smarter than them, because "even if it's true, people don't like hearing that."

Maddie had been Catarina's closest friend in law school and Maddie's obvious affection for Leonard had made him seem safe. Maddie kept her knowledge of their affair secret, just as Leonard had kept Maddie's sexuality secret since their teenage years. She could memorize six sets of numbers without writing them down, a useful trait when navigating legal rules, and easily saw how to apply the law to fact patterns.

But she had been stifled on the job market until Catarina made inroads into the D.A.'s Office and convinced O'Donnell to bring Maddie on the following year. As a result, they now shared O'Donnell as a supervisor. He was the one who advised Catarina to wear makeup because juries expected that of female prosecutors. Catarina had been secretly pleased by the results. When

Maddie joined, O'Donnell had given her regressive articles on how women could thrive in male-dominated professions, emphasizing that she wear feminine clothing and asking her to be less blunt with colleagues.

Not all attorneys at Catarina's seniority level were lucky enough to receive even shared offices, and she suspected the move was as much about her colleagues' complaints that they couldn't talk freely in the bullpen with women present. But when she and Maddie moved to their office, the walls were thin enough to hear complaints that she was an undeserving affirmative action hire getting more special treatment.

The new office was small and windowless. She chose decor that wouldn't be seen as overly feminine or Chicana: a landscape painting and her oversized diploma, leaving one empty wall. Maddie didn't decorate her desk beyond two rubber-band balls—a larger one that could no longer grow and a second baby brother—slowly taken from years of bureaucratic detritus. When Maddie wasn't in court, Catarina could tell the time by how much of Maddie's daily one-liter of Coke had been drunk. When Maddie was particularly stressed, it was a different liter in the morning and the evening.

Catarina also gently pushed Maddie to conform a little. First sharing her own frustrations, complaining about the unspoken expectation that female prosecutors wear high heels and the sheer torture of having to follow O'Donnell's fast stride as they walked through the courthouse together, where she had to do a fast little jog thing to catch up while trying not to fall and attempting to hear him while he walked a foot ahead. But, Catarina said, you join the pack or you are not part of the pack. A small gesture like wearing makeup was an easier concession to the wolves. Catarina's nudge did not move Maddie.

To O'Donnell's credit, he stopped offering new ideas after Maddie returned an etiquette book that he gave her for Christmas—placing it on his office chair with a note thanking him and

requesting no further similar gifts—and remained resolutely herself. O’Donnell had gruffly adjusted, finding roles that played to her strengths, putting her in situations she could argue on paper or at least away from juries.

\* \* \*

On Catarina’s first day back after the duplication, Catarina was especially grateful for sharing a private office. Maddie was scheduled for court all day and Catarina wanted to avoid everyone.

To get a dreaded moment over with, she took out her black-ribbon typewriter from its drawer and put it on her desk. Her mother Carmen distrusted Leonard, found his vegetarianism bizarre, and still frequently called him “the car salesman.” Catarina wrote Carmen a two-paragraph note stating simply that everything was fine following the riots but, in the aftermath, Leonard had duplicated, an uncommon but not unknown response to periods of intense stress. Everyone was feeling fine and their marriage remained solid.

After this, she turned to the mountain of paperwork left from the riots. The forms required little focus, and her memories flooded back. She took inventory of herself, searching for guilt or a sense she doing something wrong, but found nothing. Just that her body was sore in a way she typically liked, though the ache was just a little much today. She’d ask them to be gentler.

Her work phone rang. It was Joyce, who postponed her visit until Tuesday to allow more time for research. After Joyce apologized profusely and hung up, the situation felt real again. The risk of telling her supervisor versus him finding out through a third party loomed.

Feeling rudderless and abandoned by Joyce, Catarina scheduled a meeting with Father Torres for that afternoon. She belonged to Star of the Sea, a small Catholic church near their apartment, nestled between FDR Drive and a housing project. Catarina and Leonard had both been raised in neighborhoods where Catholicism was omnipresence, via church bells, jingling prayer beads as nuns walked past, blessings stenciled into laundromat windows, and endless images of Jesus

and the cross in every store, taped to tenement windows, on walls in houses, on calendars, around necks. Catarina adapted by embracing faith even more than her parents, bending Catholic tenets slightly to her own values; whereas Leonard mostly blocked the whole business out and occasionally ranted against the Vatican. His parents had fostered these views, as each had lost their own faith during Catholic School whippings.

During lunch, she went to the D.A.'s legal library and searched the indexes of the New York Supplement—a series that compiled important state judicial opinions—for cases related to duplication. She found exactly one entry: over the estate of a wealthy German expat living outside Buffalo who had duplicated during the 1950s. The German had two sons: one before and one after the duplication incident. During the duplicates' lives, they shared everything equally with little strife and no ownership documentation. But after both duplicates died in the same sailing accident, the son born pre-duplication claimed that he had greater title to the estate than the son born post-duplication. The older son argued that his younger brother was fathered by only one duplicate—and so should only receive a half-share from that father—while he, the older son, was fathered by both (because they were still the same person) and so he was entitled to a full share from one father and a half-share from the other. The younger son argued the pre-duplication son was trying to get a windfall simply by being born first. The judge agreed with the older son and he ruled that the law entitled each son to a half share of their biological father's estate, and only the older son was the biological son of both men. The case did not mention the mothers.

Reading this led Catarina to consider the legal and practical implications of her situation. If she stayed with both men, the emotional, practical and legal hurdles would be immense. If one set out and began a new life everything would feel normal again in time, but leaving one felt impossible.

Deputy O'Donnell knocking then opening her office door a few moments later. "A.D.A. Galletti—you're up," he said, "Bit of a fire drill."

Catarina followed the deputy to his office using her fast jog. O'Donnell walked stiff and straight—more like a cop than a prosecutor.

His office had a slightly frosted glass that looked out at the main bullpen. Inside was intimidating—full of serious-looking diplomas, distinctions, awards, and photos of him with important men including the former DA Brennan with Ed Koch. Still, the office wasn't as spacious as expected for his seniority, and had no windows.

"You recovered from last week? The day off help?" he asked, settling in behind his desk.

"Yes, but I'm back now," she said, taking a seat in one of two notably less-nice-than-his wooden chairs in front of his desk.

"We all appreciated the long night you put in. Now I've got a live one for you. Have you heard of *velut ex effingo*?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Neither had I. Probably pronouncing that all wrong, but sit down because this shit is fucked up, excuse my French. And my Latin. It means roughly 'The thing, copied.' A human splits in two, literally, and both come out alive. Uncommon. Not impossible. A freak thing like those Asian twins attached at the hip."

"Why are you bringing this up?" she asked, smiling almost painfully. Inside she was all panic.

"It happened after the riots, late Saturday night. In the Bronx, we had a report of a teenager who claimed he woke to the sound of himself on the floor moaning. Something didn't work about the duplication, and the kid died. Investigators looked into it but they couldn't find any bad intent. Something just went wrong and one version got a bad windpipe. Then a few more reports came in, mostly domestic disturbance from fighting couples or just scared people who witnessed an incident."

"But there's nothing illegal about that, right? We're not rounding them up?"

“No—weird but not illegal. A Census Bureau issue usually, but a couple incidents touch our office. We had a pair die of starvation in the holding pens during the riots. Expect a civil lawsuit on that.” Catarina had a vague recollection of twins dying but the memory conflated with the kid who died of dehydration. “Next we have is a nineteen-year-old still in the holding pen who came in this morning who confessed to killing himself. Kid of some Argentinean refugees. We thought he was nuts until he led us to a body. Blow to the head. Definitely intentional.”

He slid her several thin folders.

“The starvation and bad split files are just for background. I’m assigning you to the homicide. First chair. Your show.”

She lifted the murder investigation file in her hands and tapped it. She almost said, *I’ll need to speak to my husband*, but caught herself. Consulting a spouse about whether to take a case was not something a prosecutor did. Instead, she said, “Can I have a minute to decide? Look it over first?”

“I know the riot was a lot, but this isn’t really a turn-down-cases kind of day. Everyone is swamped. Christ, I thought you’d be excited for the big leagues.”

“It’s not that, I’m just not sure I’m ready,” she said with a lilt of vulnerability. “It’ll come with a spotlight, won’t it?”

He nodded sagely. “You’ve second-chaired murder cases before, this is the big leagues. The *Post* covers write themselves so it’ll be a circus, but then once you reach trial it’ll be a slam-dunk conviction.” He tapped the table with two fingers. “Galletti, I’m outta here if Koch wins. The guy under me gets my job, maybe you get his. It’d help your case to have a high-profile murder conviction under your belt.”

She swallowed hard. “I see. Of course I’ll take it.” She smiled. “Thanks, O’Donnell.”

“Perp wants to give a statement tomorrow morning, and his legal aid attorney is letting him. Be there. Hear it from the horse’s mouth.”

“Thanks,” she said. “Sounds fun.”

“When you go, let the detective on the case lead the questioning but don’t be afraid to interject or pull the detective aside, particularly if they miss something or if they are going down a road that’ll lead to inadmissible evidence.”

“I’ve done interrogations,” Catarina said. “Oh hey, do we have a database of these duplicates in case I want to track a few more down to get background, compare experiences? It would probably be relevant to show most people don’t kill or harm each other.”

“Good thinking. I doubt that’s something we have unless a crime was involved, but check records if Albany has their shit together yet—check with the DMV or IRS. Doubt they’ll give it to you without a warrant, but worth a shot. I hadn’t heard of it till this, so I’m guessing most of these fuckers keep a low profile.”

He left her with two files: one for the kid who’s duplicated died due to complications, and the other for murder. The first page of the natural causes file summarized an interview with the surviving duplicate:

Joaquin Lopez, 12, reported that he typically sleeps on the top half of a bunk bed above his fraternal twin. He was doing this on the night of July 16, 1977. Around 4:00am, he’d woken up following a nightmare and—groggy—heard sounds like a dog’s tail hitting the wood floor. He ignored the sound until a voice from the back in his mind reminded him that they had no dog. He looked down, and there on the floor was another version of him, convulsing on the ground. Joaquin screamed, waking his fraternal twin.

When he finally gathered himself enough to go to his duplicate, his duplicate’s mouth was foaming. Joaquin hugged him to try to stop the twitching and jerking his leg against the floor. Joaquin thought he heard the duplicate say “forest” but the voice was weak. By this time, the whole family had joined around him and they all heard something different. He died about thirty minutes later without speaking further.

Soon after, Joaquin ate five leftover tamales. Everyone else stayed with the body.

Officer notes on interview: Witness seems credible, speaks good English, shaken, gaunt, statement taken morning after incident. No chance of misidentification as his

twin is a sister. Improbable that there would be both a fraternal twin and undisclosed identical twin?

After finishing, Catarina pushed her palm to her eye-socket and said, “Okay. Okay.” The image of waking to a dying Leo played through her mind, her with him while Arturo stormed the fridge. Or both of them writhing on the floor.

She slowly opened the second file, which was thin, containing only one sheet. The victim’s and defendant’s identical names were used: Lucas Gonzalez (Suspect), 19 years old and Lucas Gonzalez (Victim), 19 years old. The same photo was used for each, a mugshot of the living one taken after the victim’s time of death. The case summary was still empty.

Catarina closed the door and called the Spanish Harlem apartment. No one picked up. She tried Leo at his office, and reached him.

“I have a chance to run lead on a homicide investigation. First time first chair. My case. Someone killed their duplicate.”

“Shit,” Leo said. “When was it?”

“The same night as you.”

A pause. “Is that a conflict of interest?”

“I don’t think so. Anyhow, I feel I either have to take it or tell O’Donnell I’m living with the two of you. Turning it down without explanation would seem suspicious.”

“Huh.” He paused. “If you don’t mention the duplication now, the career consequences might be even worse later. They might judge you either way, but if you hide it then they have a hook to demote you or whatever.”

“I don’t want to tell them now. It’s personal and, well, telling them now might cost this opportunity even though it shouldn’t.”

He was briefly silent again, and she sensed him weighing the tensions in her logic. “Why do you think O’Donnell tapped you?” he asked.

“He didn’t say. But you’ve got a Hispanic defendant and, well, victim. It’ll be high profile, so maybe optics for the jury and press? Or maybe he thinks I’ll have the cultural understanding and language skills. He’s hard to read.” O’Donnell could be overly realpolitik sometimes, but other times unexpectedly paternal towards Catarina.

“Probably a bit of both.” Leo exhaled. “I’d say take it if you’re comfortable with the risk.”

She smiled.

Leo continued. “What does this mean for Arturo? Does he need to lay low? He still needs a driver’s license, an attorney license, health insurance. He’s not going to want to sit in the apartment until this is done.”

“No. No. That would look like we were trying to hide. We’ll do the paperwork, then hope nobody notices until I am in a more honorable position.”

“You’re in an honorable position now,” he said.

“You know what I mean. What others will think. What I’d think if I wasn’t inside this.”

He paused, and she could feel him weighing whether to debate. “I’ll tell the other guy.”

“No, I’ll catch him later.”

\* \* \*

From Dean’s, Arturo biked over the Brooklyn Bridge to Alice’s school.

Alice smiled and waved mid-pirouette when she spotted Arturo through the glass wall between the dance floor and hallway. She was dressed as the sugar-plum-fairy, an outfit that complemented her short and sandy blonde hair. She told a gaggle of six-year-old tulips, teacups and gumdrops to scatter with a double flick of her fingers, then tiptoed to him with perfect posture.

“You look naked without the mustache. When did that happen?” Alice asked.

“Cat shaved it last night,” he said.

“Tell her I approve,” she said distractedly. “What’s this?” Alice asked as he gave her the bag with the sculpture. She looked into the bag. “*The Hands*,” she answered herself with mock ominousness. “Have time for lunch?” She dabbed her face with a hand-towel, and looked at him eagerly.

“All the time in the world and a bagged lunch.”

“Great! I’ve some leftovers in the fridge. I’ll change quick.” She paused. “Okay if I don’t shower, to save time?” She gave herself a thoughtful sniff, then looked to him for approval.

“You’re fine.”

She nodded, tip-toed backwards then disappeared into the changing room. While she transformed from sugar-plum-fairy to Alice, Arturo looked on at the interracial hodgepodge of kids whispering and giggling. One waved. Arturo waved back.

Returned, Alice touched his shoulder. “Oh goodness, we’re already doing tryouts for the winter show and they’re so excited. They’ll all get a part, it’s the same crew from Swan Lake, but everyone wants what their older sister was. Let’s sneak out before they come talk to you, or we’ll never escape.” As she spoke, a student costumed as a mouse approached. “Hello, Miguel,” she said, her tone warm and respectful.

“Alice,” Miguel said, “you’re naked.”

Alice looked at her dress, confused. She looked back at him, then followed his eyes to her upper arm. “Oh my, I am. There’s a pen on the counter. Hurry.” She knelt down and he carefully drew a smile beneath a triangle of freckles on her upper arm, and a face emerged.

“Better?” Alice asked.

Miguel looked at the face and nodded seriously, then ran back to replace the pen and melted back into the pack of children. Alice pulled Arturo towards the exit.

\* \* \*

Arturo had been introduced to the habit of the drawn smile before he'd learned Alice's name.

He'd attended a word-of-mouth series of guerilla shows at the derelict Prospect Park bandshell in the early '70s that included live music, dancers, and readings, bringing new life into Leonard's childhood neighborhood. Catarina had been working late, and so he'd gone with Dean.

The bandshell had three giant beige arcs that loomed above a stage in front of a plaza, which opened up to the grassy, lightly wooded hillside beyond the plaza. Alice's troupe had painted a giant silhouette of a dancer mid-arabesque on the bandshell that popped out in contrast with the bright existing graffiti. Through word of mouth alone, the crowd built the course of the week such that around two hundred attended by the weekend.

The plaza was used as a dancefloor and the grassy area seats.

Alice danced in a ballet reinterpreting Don Quixote. Arturo was close enough to the stage to notice the ink smile on her upper arm. It clashed with her Spanish shoulder blouse and tiered and ruffled long skirt.

After the show finished the artists mingled with the crowd on the plaza and he found her—in costume and surrounded by Don Quixote, Sancho and Basil—and asked about her arm. Alice laughed and nodded enthusiastically, and instead of answering she said, “your smile is immaculate” leading him to think she'd misheard him. She said she heard him but just liked his smile, something he didn't mention when recounting the night to Catarina. Alice had a habit of complementing people she'd recently met. She was new to the area and had only met the guerilla organizers of the show a week before her first performance. She'd gotten her teaching gig in downtown Brooklyn but had been couch-surfing with friends. She loved his old neighborhood. He told her the popular joke that in designing the bandshell Robert Moses had wanted to evoke the experience of being a parking lot while in nature. She told him that Park Slope seemed bursting with artistic energy and

community. She wanted to live there forever. Leonard got to play the native, offering local connections, shops to visit, and a history of the neighborhood. Growing up, the area had felt more Catholic and working class until the counter-culture types came for the cheap rent. Now it was a community of people looking to try out reconfigured lives: people living together without marrying, divorcees, inter-racial couples. Alice ended up crashing on Leonard and Catarina's couch for about a week until a family friend gave her a lead on her eventual home.

When Alice's variety shows started up, he and Catarina went. Alice showed shown them a photo of her as a child on a tire swing in Santa Fe, proudly showing off the ink smile. Slowly throughout life, she'd drawn it less, and now only regularly wore the smile when teaching—some younger sibling of a past student always expected this, and oh the delight they took in drawing on their teacher. She hadn't once asked Arturo to draw the smile, though countless children, friends and random partygoers had been allowed this intimacy. Perhaps she saw Arturo as too serious. He worried he had inadvertently contributed to the decline of her lingered childhood habit by making her feel self-conscious. Arturo once tried to re-assure her that he liked it, but this made her act more self-conscious still. She often commented how all the things around him seemed so adult: a long-married lawyer helping immigrants avoid deportation. Most of her friends were starving artists living five to an apartment, or receiving secret money from home.

During the early weeks of a new ballet class, Alice's students clamored to have a turn drawing the smile. Once they had all had a turn or two, the novelty of this quirk of their teacher would fade. Miguel had wanted to continue on drawing duty long after the others lost interest, clearly in love yet not treating Arturo as a threat but as an equal. Alice was his during ballet classes and Arturo's when he came to pick her up for lunch. Arturo wondered how long Miguel would be crushed when the show ended and her daily presence was withdrawn suddenly and permanently.

Miguel was also the only student to ever draw a frown, not as misbehavior—but following a child’s logic he’d believed the drawing should match Alice’s current mood and, until that day, she’d always seemed to him happy. He’d been right about her bad mood when he drew the frown.

\* \* \*

Alice and Arturo took their bag lunches to the Brooklyn Promenade, and found a bench with a fine view of the East River and downtown Manhattan. Their bagged lunches between them, Arturo faced the view but Alice sat cross-legged on the bench and sat facing him.

They split their lunches. He had a peanut butter and banana sandwich, while Alice’s lunch was leftover Chinese and a small bag of cherries.

Arturo told Alice about the duplication, and Alice watched him seriously and silently, slowly taking cherries from her bag.

“What now?” she asked.

“Now we figure things out,” he said.

She rolled a cherry pit in her mouth thoughtfully. She sifted through the cherries for the next one she wanted. She picked one. “Just let me know how I can help. I’m here if you need me.”

\* \* \*

Catarina caught Arturo on the phone at the apartment in the late afternoon. Their conversation echoed the conversation with Leo, though with a stronger undercurrent of tension when he asked if he’d need to “sit around in the apartment until this is done,” a fair divergence given that he was the one asked whose life was being disrupted.

Catarina left work early for her appointment with Father Torres. The Four Train was crowded with folks in Yankee gear headed to the Bronx. Always better to get stuck in baseball crowds before the game than coming back, when they were drunker.

Small ceiling fans were the only things cooling the train car—one dangled out of its socket, wires exposed. She positioned herself in the path of a working one. She focused on a couple standing against the train doors: a clean-cut, athletic white man with bland but earnest eyes and a fit Chicana who was openly wearing her engagement ring; a bold move while going through Harlem headed for the Bronx. Both were draped in sports gear. The Chicana was watching her man, smiling, as he spoke with a group of his friends about some old game. Catarina could have easily been this woman, married to a finance guy or a doctor. He carried the air of a worry-free life, while his partner looked like maybe she'd seen some things but had let that worry-free air rub off on her, gotten used to it. She chimed in something coarse about a Boston player to show she was one of the boys.

The train stopped between stations, briefly, and Catarina flashed back to being stuck underground during the blackout. When the train started up again a wave of raw, complex emotions surfaced around her added husband: the split changed nothing about her connection and vows; the split changed everything. Even the choice to confess the situation to her priest felt fraud. The confession booth was for repenting, which had four rigidly ordered stages: contrition, confession, penance, and absolution. She felt guilt, but no contrition in her bones or certainty that she was doing something morally wrong.

During her affair with Leonard, a voice inside her had whispered that he was a minor devil trying to pull her from a marriage recognized in the eyes of God. And, of course, leaving a husband for another man was morally fraught. This internal voice was then echoed by the advice of her old Upper East Side priest, Father Barrett. Father Barrett had suggested she preserve her vow to Duncan at all costs. He had emphasized the Catholic Church didn't permit communion for remarried women (a mortal sin, even absent adultery) citing Mark chapter 10 ("if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery against him"). This advice had devastated her and, with hindsight, was narrow-minded and lacked nuance to her specifics.

Now this internal voice had returned telling her she was again living in sin by allowing two men in her bed—a taboo act in the eyes of the world and, perhaps, God. Once again, there existed the risk of losing herself completely to sins of the flesh. This time the signs of the devil’s involvement was more direct because duplication had the air of the supernatural. The thick humidity added to the subway car’s claustrophobic atmosphere. *There’s no harm this time*, she thought, resisting the voice. *They both agree that this is inside our vow.*

*They’re each agreeing to tolerate the other only under duress*, the internal voice said. *They’re so afraid of losing you they’d agree to anything. And you’ll need to leave one eventually.*

Deep in thought, Catarina missed her train stop and arrived slightly late. Stepping over the threshold into the church, she paused to see if she might burn up. Anticlimactically, she felt nothing different even when she touched the bowl of holy water.

The interior of Star of the Sea was small and wooden, more fitting for a Mexican village. Various saints and trinkets adorned the walls and dangled from the ceiling. She knew Father Torres didn’t favor the gaudiness, but had changed nothing out of respect for history. During her first confession, he’d scoffed at Father Barrett’s interpretation of Mark chapter 10—reassuring her that God had far more worrisome matters to concern himself with than remarriage, emboldening her to trust him not to judge her harshly now.

Father Torres was praying in the front pew. He turned as she opened the door. With a gesture, they headed for the confessional booth. He was in his early fifties with thick lips that did not match his emaciated body. Through the confessional screen, she watched these lips purse as she posed Leo and Arturo’s situation as a hypothetical—making clear that there was no original and no copy, just two identical husbands.

The priest noted that duplicating a human, if possible, would likely be an abomination in God's eyes, and the woman Catarina described should not consider either resulting man her true husband. Rather, her real husband would be gone—the soul destroyed by the immorality of the act itself. No annulment necessary. He sounded disinterested, as though he'd been handed a pointless quiz.

“But if the splitting were involuntary, it wouldn't be his fault. Either of their faults.”

Father Torres let out an exasperated sigh and opened the screen between them. “Catarina, come out of the confessional. My office.”

He started to close the screen, but it got stuck halfway. “Oh for the love of—” he said. He hit it so that it rattled, but still didn't shut, and he left it half open. They exited and he led her back to the sacristy.

“Am I allowed back—”

“Catarina, I don't have time, just come on.” He rinsed his hands in a washbasin and removed his robe, revealing a cheap suit.

From the sacristy, they went through a door into a hallway that led finally to his office. It was humid and poorly lit, with a faint scent of mildew. Paperwork, copies of the *Wall Street Journal*, *The Seven Storey Mountain* and unwashed coffee mugs nested around her. He sat behind his desk and gestured to an old wooden chair. The wind gusted outside, rattling his cracked window.

“Now, what's going on—you come in each weekend, you ask forgiveness for the young men you're putting in jail. You don't ask about nonsense hypotheticals.”

“Father, Leonard had a fever and the next day there were two of him. He really duplicated.”

“Your husband has a twin, right? This isn't just an elaborate trick?”

“Dean and Leo don't look alike really, not enough to be mistaken. And there have been other cases. It's rare but medically possible.”

“Wait!” Father Torres said. He closed his eyes and rubbed his temples. Unexpectedly, he put his feet up on the desk. The soles of his shoes were worn, making her think of the photo of Adlai Stevenson in the United Nations, hardworking and ragtag. She saw his mind whirring like a judge’s, weighing her credibility and the alleged facts. A full minute later he reopened his eyes. “Okay,” he said. “I believe you.”

She exhaled. “Thank you, Father. It’s a lot. It’s a lot of things. What’s most important, though, is that I made a vow in the eyes of God, and that means something. Right? That doesn’t go away.” She’d put aside that she’d once broken such a vow. “Maybe this is a gift from God—of two of them. And I should cherish them both completely. The vow just . . . expands. In which case, I shouldn’t question it any more than any other miracle.”

“I don’t have a canonical answer to your question. But I suspect that if you go around saying that Jesus is okay with polyandry, most Catholics will call you a heretic.”

“Would you call me a heretic?”

“Probably.”

This disappointed her. He’d recently caused a stir by preaching that Hell did not exist, causing his original congregation to thin and the larger Catholic Church to denounce him. He’d briefly gained new members from gay and counterculture communities that far outnumbered what he’d lost. The aging church’s plumbing couldn’t handle the influx but the attendees in the pews admirably ignored the stench. It didn’t matter in the end, anyway: Father Torres disappointed the progressives by explaining that he saw homosexual relationships as ill-advised because they were sterile, even if not damned to Hell. He had made no effort to retain the progressives as they lost interest, noting that a congregation should be drawn primarily from the local community.

“Catarina,” Father Torres said. “You know that a little heresy doesn’t matter to me. The question you need to ask is ‘does this make sense?’ When I started preaching that nobody goes to

Hell, I was asking myself, ‘does the framework of Hell make sense?’ Most teachings of the Church are built on sound moral foundation, and so they deserve our deference. They make us better and healthier. I’ve seen too many unbaptized children die because of mistakes by powerful men to continue preaching Hell as punishment for sin on Earth. I couldn’t imagine them following their brief time here with damnation. They were already damned here. That’s my personal heresy.

“Now, in your situation, the one husband to one wife formula has a function. For balance. For children. The ratio works—and whether or not having two husbands is broadly immoral—Catarina, you’re not some free-loving bohemian. You’re not a Mormon man. Your family and support network aren’t either. Long-term, you’re not going to be able to sustain this alone. The people around you are unlikely to feel comfortable supporting some novel relationship structure even if they love you. Perhaps because they love you, and fear for you.”

“Please. Please,” Catarina said, putting her hand up protectively, trying to slow Father Torres down.

“And consider,” Father Torres persisted, “will each Leonard be satisfied with half your attention, even if he’s sharing with another version of himself? Staying with both could destroy your marriage.”

“So, what, flip a coin?”

“I don’t know that it’s your responsibility, or even your place, to choose. If they’re identical and they care for you, maybe let them decide. Let them pray on it. You can be kind to the one who must leave, but let him go.”

\* \* \*

On her walk back to the apartment, Catarina recalled her disappointing visit to Vatican City after learning of Duncan’s affair but before meeting Leonard; the flight was paid by Duncan, though she went alone. In St. Peter’s Basilica was a long row of confessions, with languages spoken listed

above each entrance. She'd gone to a Spanish-speaking booth, and there finally felt safe revealing the shame of Duncan's infidelity. The priest treated her revelation as mundane, prescribing that if Duncan showed remorse then she should stoically bear the cross of her husband's infidelity.

Later, after her own infidelity, neither her priest nor her family was so understanding. She had to switch churches. Her mother Carmen had refused to attend Catarina's second marriage and didn't speak to Catarina for nearly a year. Her father was different. Pedro openly preferred Leonard to Duncan, but this was perhaps in part a subconscious vindication of his own decision to divorce Carmen.

The resurfaced, bitter memories blunted some of the sting from Father Torres' words, since the church's advice had proved wrong for her before.

She resolved not to share the conversation with Leo and Arturo.

\* \* \*

Leo reported that Capra & Cipriani wouldn't be hiring Arturo anytime soon. A flash of paranoia hit Arturo: how could his counterpart be sure without directly revealing the duplication? But the outcome made sense given the firm's finances and the recession, so he didn't press.

Alone, Arturo was suspicious of his rival, but in his presence, the emotions felt more complex. Along with rivalry was a close, familiar bond and natural chemistry, like finally meeting someone you'd worked with over the phone for years.

"I was useless today at work," his duplicate said.

"Do you remember, as we were falling asleep, we were thinking of alternatives to the immigration work?" Arturo asked. They'd begun using the royal 'we' about their shared past when alone, but not in front of Catarina.

"Was it union organizing or immigration advocacy? Opening a bikeshop? It's hazy."

Said out loud, their nighttime thoughts sounded hopelessly scattershot and vague, like a high schooler describing what he wanted to do after graduation. “Yeah—we’ll narrow it. Maybe you could quit too? We could try more options quickly.”

“If Cat gets that prosecutor job in Brooklyn,” Leo said, “money would be less tight. Then, maybe. Maybe even collaborate.” *If Cat gets the job* lingered like a bell’s hum. Arturo anticipated his duplicate’s response, except for this qualifier. “We could take one job that’s some kind of ‘with-your-hands’ skill and an idealistic one to change the world. That’s the idea, right?”

“Right,” Arturo said. Why would Leo need to confirm something they’d already agreed? “Maybe we can remind her to apply tonight just so it doesn’t get lost. For now, we should probably get some more clothing. We need to be cleaner, or she’s going to go nuts.”

“What about the old mattress?”—the replaced mattress was still in the lobby, where they’d placed it with a note in case another tenant wanted it—“Do we want to keep it in case one person decides to give the others privacy?”

“I don’t know.” Arturo said, imagining being the one left out. Being exiled from Catarina felt dangerous, as if the first man alone with her might become the authentic Leonard. “Not really, but that might be practical. This is hard.”

They put off deciding. While waiting for Catarina, they played some simple word and board games, and agreed to create a baseline of how they matched up that they could check over the weeks to come, to see if they were diverging. White had won the chess match, which made sense if they were evenly matched. The numbers were all different on each sheet, but some of the words and sentences lined up.

## Chapter Six

The next day, Catarina arrived at the 25th precinct at 10:15 a.m.

She'd called ahead to make sure a Spanish interpreter was available. She always introduced herself as a prosecutor to avoid being mistaken for an interpreter. She could joke away that mistake fairly easily, but once when an interpreter didn't appear, she'd had to translate for a detective, and afterwards felt she wasn't treated as a true equal in the process; the detective even asked her to translate documents. She'd learned her lesson.

A secretary swiftly guided Catarina through the Investigations Bullpen, an open room full of ringing phones, loud typing and chatter. The room's volume lowered as she passed by, everyone's eyes on her. Perhaps they were responding to the notoriety of her case or more simply to a female prosecutor. Several desks had nude pin-up calendars or a poster of Farrah Fawcett with her nipples showing through a red swimsuit.

The detective assigned was named Fergus Murphy, probably Irish and rounding 40. He radiated weary confidence that made his plain face handsome. A newsboy hat complemented his tweed suit and tie—his clean-cut style only interrupted by a black eye and a red beard stubble. He guided her to his cubical space, which was cluttered with a typewriter, a phone, and various stacks of paper and files. He had no personal effects other than a photo of a German Shepard mutt, probably the love of his life.

“Gift from the riots?” she asked.

“And a broken rib to match,” he said with a wincing smile. “Like an idiot I went out when the call went out to help the officers to help control the jackals. You know why half the cops didn't show up?”

She could think of many reasons—resentment towards police budget cuts, low morale from constant scandal, fear of a mob that vastly outnumbered them in blackout darkness, but she sensed he had a specific theory to share. “Why?” she asked.

“The big mistake was not letting cops take out their guns on the looters. When we heard we had to use kid gloves, well then what we going to do out, go be sitting ducks for those jackal packs?”

She weighed this. “I don’t know—the looters we locked up during the blackout seemed pretty different from the usual crowd.”

“The guy who broke my rib with a bat seemed pretty usual to me,” he said.

“If we used a heavy hand, then night may have ended even uglier,” she said. “And it looked to me like some of ours used a heavy hand despite the call for restraint.”

He put his hand up, signaling defeat.

“Also, please don’t ever use that term if I put you on the stand,” she said. “*Jackals*.”

“I’ll be a good boy scout, don’t worry. Not my first rodeo,” he said. “And for the record, if you’re implying something, I have nothing against any ethnicity. Every group has its jackals—Italians, Jews, my fellow Irishmen. And I feel for the honest people having to walk past open-air drug markets after they finish their shift as a janitor or cabbie or whatever, stepping over junkies to get into their homes—the ones who didn’t loot, but still woke up to see their neighborhood burned down.”

She was losing him, and she’d need his help on this case and in the future. “My father worked construction in a poor Mexican neighborhood in Philly,” she said in a softer tone. “He was proud of doing honest work. I know what you’re saying.”

“And look at you now: representing the City of New York as it collapses,” he said with a wink, and an undercurrent of genuine approval.

“Anything I need to know about this kid?” she asked. “Anything his background show?”

“We talked to the parents. Father says he was an engineer someone linked to the deposed liberal party in Argentina. Mother’s an apolitical housewife. They came over about two and a half years ago. Who knows why they really fled Argentina? For all we know they could have been working for the regime but lost favor.”

“Alright then.” She closed her eyes. Her fingers tingled. Her first murder interrogation.

He leaned in. “First time running a murder trial?” he asked in a lower voice, as if reading her mind.

She paused, looked down wondering how it showed, then nodded. “I’ve second-chaired.”

“Congratulations! They tossed you a softball, even if the details are weird. This is as straightforward as it gets—confession, weapon, body. Only thing to wrap up is how many years you want to stick him away for. Nothing to be nervous about.”

“Well then, let’s do it,” she said.

The accused was in the interrogation room already.

On the other side of the glass, the defense attorney was whispering to his new client. The attorney was middle-aged man wearing a kippah and tattered blue suit. He introduced himself as Stanley Shapiro with an air of dispirited idealism. The interpreter could have been Catarina’s sister. Catarina shook hands and apologized for being late. The defendant, Lucas Gonzalez, was an acned teenager with a buzz cut. He appeared badly malnourished; possibly he was regaining his natural weight back slower than Leo and Arturo. He also looked indifferent and bored in a teenage way, though his eyes were bloodshot.

“Jesus,” she said. “Please tell me that’s not how we got the confession.”

“Nah—he showed up like that,” Murphy said.

Catarina introduced herself in Spanish, explaining who she was and what a prosecutor's duty was, with the translator translating for everyone else in the room. She hoped this might make him more at ease and forthcoming.

"Your Spanish is guttural," was his only response, in sharp contrast with his frightened body language. This unsettled Catarina—his bringing into the interrogation room the common Argentine belief that they spoke Spanish correctly, and Mexicans spoke it incorrectly.

"We're both exiles here," she replied. He was just trying to show bravado in a dire situation, but Catarina became self-conscious and minimized her accent.

He rolled his eyes. "I'm an exile, you're an American."

The translator looked at Catarina helplessly before translating. The defense attorney, perhaps catching this look, requested that Catarina use English. Catarina felt relieved.

"I want to make clear," Shapiro added, "that this interview is given voluntarily and against the advice of counsel, but Legal Aid understands why he wants to speak. We hope and expect his contrition and cooperation—"

"Come off it, contrition?" Detective Murphy said. "Twenty seconds and he's insulted my prosecutor when: We've. Got. The. Body." He slammed the table with each beat.

"A body that he led you to," Shapiro said. "Your boys didn't believe a body existed."

Catarina bit her lip and made eye contact with the defendant while the two quibbled. When they finished, she invited the defendant to recount exactly what had happened.

As Lucas's story began, his bravado deflated.

He was awake when the split happened, not on any drugs, just a beer or two. He'd been out at a Harlem club celebrating getting the power back on. He was planning to sleep but just couldn't. He didn't know why. He described the split happening, a searing pain, the ripped clothes, how they both rolled apart and stood. They asked 'who are you' simultaneously, then nothing further. He got

the idea that the other guy would try to hurt him, something in the way his breathing got heavier like he was steeling his resolve. He grabbed a nearby bat and struck the other version in the head. The other version fell and was completely still. After the heightened sense of danger receded, Lucas shook his counterpart and apologized. The absence of blood gave him hope the injuries weren't too bad, but he didn't respond. He wasn't breathing. Hours later, the living Lucas moved the dead body in the basement of an abandoned apartment up the street with some of their favorite things so he wouldn't be lonely, but then he couldn't handle the idea of the other him being all alone without a proper burial or last rites. That was when he went to the cops.

The defense attorney, prosecutor and detective had all remained largely mute during the lengthy confession.

"How much do you weigh?" Catarina asked after he finished.

Lucas looked confused. His attorney looked suspicious, weighing whether to intervene. "I don't know," Lucas said.

"A dead body is pretty heavy, right? Given that you'd recently split, were you feeling weak and hungry? Was it hard to move yourself in that state?" she said, thinking back to her husbands' struggle down the stairs post-duplication.

"I'm strong," he said. "I handled it."

Shapiro looked about speak.

"Alright," Catarina said. "Just asking. I really appreciate you coming forward and helping us."

After the defendant was cleared out of the room, nobody spoke for a minute. The detective stood and leaned back against a wall. Shapiro slowly put papers into his briefcase and organized things. Catarina just tapped her fingers on the table and waited.

“He’ll plead to second degree manslaughter if you give a reasonable offer,” Shapiro suggested, breaking the silence.

“Second degree manslaughter?” Catarina asked. “When we can charge for murder?”

“You know murder won’t stick. If being attacked by yourself doesn’t qualify for an extreme emotional disturbance defense, I’ll quit the law.” Shapiro’s haggard look suggested he meant this—like a judge declaring his client didn’t qualify might really cause him to give up on the profession. She simultaneously found his threat melodramatic yet empathized with his frustration with how judges sometimes stretched the law to allow heavy charges.

“Second degree manslaughter suggests he didn’t intend to injure the victim. That’s not what I just heard.”

“They had a struggle in the dark. Anyway, I don’t really care if you call it first-degree manslaughter or second-degree, so long as the number of years he goes away is reasonable. Offer this kid a fair plea deal.”

“We’ll take it under consideration,” Catarina said. “You know how these things work.”

“Do it quick. When you indict, maybe before, the news will get out to the press and nobody is going to want to look weak on crime in an environment like this. Public sentiment plus the mayoral election.”

“What makes you think that I want to be weak on crime in an environment like this?” Catarina asked.

“Come on.” Shapiro said. “This isn’t being weak on crime. He’s a kid clearly acting in self-defense. If anyone ever had reason to think the world was coming for them, it’s him.”

She tapped her pen on the table. “A number of duplications happened after the riots. He’s the only one who killed his counterpart.”

“If that’s true, I’m sure the others didn’t have his background. His folks fled Argentina because people are disappearing Stalin-style. A good kid who saw ugly shit not long ago. A stranger shows up in his bedroom who looks exactly like him and who assaults him—Lucas overreacts in self-defense.”

“He killed someone, that’s a heck of an overreaction.” Catarina stood and paced a little, considering. “And if they’re fundamentally identical and just split, then they knew what the other was thinking because it’s the same thing. So, Lucas couldn’t reasonably suspect his duplicate intended to kill him unless Lucas intended to kill his duplicate already. At that stage, both had murderous intent. That’s not acting in self-defense.”

“You’re looking at this from the perspective of someone who knows how duplication works. My guy doesn’t ask what the other guy is thinking. He comes from a superstitious people, no offense, and you see someone who looks like you, your mind jumps to evil spirits, changelings, coyotes, whatever you grow up hearing about . . .”

“Superstitious? He was the son of an engineer. Anyway, even if that establishes an emotional distress defense, he would still be guilty of manslaughter—and he’s facing a lot of time.”

“All I’m asking is fairness. Just don’t indict or give the press a heads up until you offer a plea deal, that’s all,” Shapiro said. “Not a specific offer. Not a pass. He could have gotten away scot free—a body nobody was looking for in a place nobody would find it.” Prosecutors and defense attorneys often did a dance of informally previewing their theory of the case—what they would argue in court—when negotiating pleas. Shapiro seemed more forthright than usual, not holding back concessions until after he saw the jury makeup or the city’s evidence.

“I’ll take it under consideration,” she said. “You’ll need to consent to him being held without charges while I run it up the chain.”

Shapiro nodded, snapped his briefcase shut then stood and looked at Catarina gravely.

“Ms. Galletti, if I could give some free advice—I’ve been doing this for twenty plus years,” he said. “I’ve watched prosecutors come and go. Some good; some not so good/ In my experience, the greatest risk for them isn’t developing punitive ideologies or God complexes from the power of their discretion. It’s careerism.” As he spoke, he sounded like he was speaking to a law graduation assembly behind her. “Meaning, the easiest way to guess how some prosecutor will act is asking what will get them the next step up the ladder—whether that’s an internal promotion, or a judgeship, or politics. You can spot those prosecutors because they always hit unpopular, high-profile targets they know they can beat, even if winning those cases won’t have much impact—while ignoring white-collar crimes by powerful players. Much rarer to see prosecutors risk hitting challenging targets where they could ruffle feathers of potential campaign donors—even if trying those cases would protect the public more.”

“That’s advice?”

“My advice is to go home tonight ask yourself what you stand for, what your ideals are, why you got into this—write it down, then use that list to gut check your major decisions to see if you’re upholding your own values.”

Catarina nodded slowly—her face purposefully impassive. “I’ve been prosecuting six years now. I’d say my values are fixed enough not to be manipulated by defense attorney sidebars.”

He put up his hands indicating surrender, his suitcase dangling from his thumb. “Everyone looks young to me. I tell this to all attorneys when I first meet them.”

“Then I’ll take it as a complement. I’ll get back to you about a possible plea.”

Shapiro half-bowed several times, thanking her as he did so. The bows seemed like an exaggerated version of Asian formality that looked odd being done by a white man. Then he exited quickly, leaving Catarina alone with the detective.

“You did good, kid,” Detective Murphy said. “I thought for a second you might fall for that. Even I felt something when the kid cried.”

“Do you think he gave that little speech to Eddie Fernandez?” she asked with a smile. Shapiro’s advice had sounded rehearsed enough that he probably did say it to all young prosecutors when he had the chance—and not just to women, but something in her actions must have suggested she’d be receptive.

“I’m just surprised he gave it while I was in the room.”

She nodded. “Can you get me Lucas’s school records, grades, behavior, whatever you can—and anything on what the parents are doing now that they’re in the states?”

He nodded. “If his story was true, wouldn’t they have both killed each other at the same time?” he asked.

She paused. “One splits to the left, and the other to the right. One was closer to the bat.”

The detective whistled. “Dumb luck.”

“Dumb luck,” she agreed.

\* \* \*

Joyce was scheduled to visit the Galletti apartment after work that same evening. At the last minute, Catarina let Arturo loop in his immediate family. In anticipation of their arrival, Catarina gave the space a quick overdue cleaning and grew increasingly stressed. The idea of Joyce’s trip had been reassuring—duplication presented biological questions with answers—but once Joyce left, Catarina would need to face the reality that biology wouldn’t solve their larger issues.

Leo and Arturo’s parents, Alessandro and Linda, arrived early with Dean and seated themselves on the couch. Dean had a pack of cigarettes rolled up his shirt sleeve like a greaser. Alessandro had southern Italian olive skin and coiffed straight black hair, and his thick eyebrows were covered by thick black glasses. He was visibly drunk but had thoughtfully brought enough

lasagna and eggplant parm for everyone. Linda was tall, light-skinned, and had high cheekbones. Leo and Arturo had gone together in person to explain the duplication. Linda had fainted seeing them both, but now Alessandro looked the worse of the two and kept resting his hand on Linda for support.

Leo and Arturo leaned against the wall speaking to each other, with Arturo's back to her. They wore similar sleeveless white t-shirts, creating a mirrored effect. They'd already lost some of their gauntness, which made the atmosphere of a family emergency illness seem absurd.

Joyce knocked on the front door and the room went silent. Catarina went to let her in. "Cat!" Joyce cried. She was wearing aviators and holding a binder of papers. In college, Joyce had resembled Amelia Earhart enough to create a plausible Halloween costume using only items from her dorm closet. Motherhood had added new crow's feet around her eyes; only her gap tooth and eager movement preserved her air of youthfulness.

"So, I'm not crazy," Catarina whispered in Joyce's ear as they hugged.

"I'd like to talk to them individually, if that's okay with you."

Catarina nodded.

"Affair rules, huh?" Joyce said, jerking her head towards the couch as they separated.

"We couldn't keep it from his family," Catarina said. Joyce shrugged and stepped into the apartment.

"Wow," Joyce said, taking in the place.

"Sorry, I haven't dusted," Catarina said. "Work is busy."

"That's not what I meant. You've made a home," Joyce said. "So much more alive than your last place." Had Joyce not visited Catarina since the wedding? Catarina calculated and was surprised this was true; she always saw Joyce in Philly. Now the space felt fresh through Joyce's eyes: the worn drawers missing metal handles and scratches from many moves all showed character. Also, the

touches of a loved home: the Mexican honeymoon photos, the books spilling off the shelf. As though they'd lived so much life together their place could barely contain it.

“Joyce, thanks for coming,” Leo said, and hugged Joyce warmly while Arturo waited his turn, then repeated the ritual.

“Wow. Really two then. I like the mustache, no-mustache,” Joyce said

“Thanks. Cat did it,” Arturo said, feeling his smooth upper lip.

“Joyce is going to talk to you alone one at a time,” Catarina said. “Be honest, okay?”

\* \* \*

They used the bedroom. After Leo went, Arturo's turn came. Joyce had an energy that seemed almost giddy, like an attorney might have after scoring a deep-pocketed defendant with an expensive, high-stakes problem. No wonder clients hated their lawyers.

Joyce closed the door and sat by the vanity while Arturo sat at the bed. She made clear she wouldn't share his answers with anyone, not Catarina or Leo. Then she asked some basic questions, jotting frantically on a yellow notepad even when he didn't say that much.

“In the weeks before the duplication, did you experience any changes in appetite, abdominal pain, constipation, trouble focusing?” Joyce asked.

“Nothing like that before the split. After the split, we were starving and probably ate more than usual for a few days, slept a little longer,” Arturo said.

“Were you exposed to any kind of new environmental toxins that you can remember? Something the night of the riots? Chemicals at the bike shop, maybe helping to work on your parents' house? Lead? Asbestos? Radiation?”

“No radiation. Nothing unusual during the riots that the rest of the city isn't exposed to. Do people think this is triggered by an exposure?”

“Nobody knows. I’m working with the training I have, which is in toxins. There has been an uptick in duplications in the twentieth century compared to prior generations. That could mean that we’re being increasingly exposed to environmental contaminant—something there that nobody has spotted—but the change could also be explained by better reporting or other factors.”

He nodded.

“Were you under an unusual amount of stress?” Joyce asked. “Fighting with Cat? Trouble at work? Something from the riots, maybe?”

“I’m always under an unusual amount of stress, but no more so than the rest of the city. Cat and I did have a tense discussion the night before the split.”

Joyce smiled a polite, tight-lipped smile. “Did you express this to anyone?”

“Catarina and I communicate well, I hope.” He laughed. “If duplicating was a response to stress, it’s not a helpful one. Now I’m more stressed.”

“How so?” Joyce asked, cocking her head to one side. His leg started bouncing up and down.

“I feel a dizzy unreality whenever I remember. I’m startled and disoriented each time I see myself, when I first wake up. What if because of this new stress I enter a cycle of getting stressed because I duplicated, then duplicating again?” Joyce made a check mark next to something already written on a prior page on her yellow pad, confirming his suspicion. “You’ve already had this conversation with the other Leonard. With Leo.”

She looked up, caught, then smiled, showcasing her gap tooth. “Not this part.”

“That’s comforting.”

“This part either.” She gently put her hand on Arturo’s shaking leg, stilling it. She looked at him expectantly, waiting for a reaction. He searched for how he should be feeling: it wasn’t a sexual

gesture, more comforting yet clinical. Perhaps she was balancing being an empathetic friend and a curious scientist. He put his hand over hers simply to respond with something.

“Huh,” Joyce said. She removed her hand and jotted notes as though there’d been a test. “How are you feeling right now?”

“Complex. Exhausted. Tired. But also alive in a new way. Tingly, but I can’t tell if it’s the duplication or how the duplication has shaken up my life, our lives. I think the uncertainty of what happens next is thrilling, even if I want certainty. It makes me focus on valuing the moments I have. Being here right now, about to go into the next room and hold my wife’s hand while you talk. I wish I could hold onto this moment and not move onto what’s next because that might not be as good.”

“How do you feel about staying at home while Leo stayed at the job?”

“I don’t know, it’s fine.”

“I can’t imagine you mean that. Unexpectedly losing a job would be difficult for anyone. You’ve got to be truthful with me.”

“Right, yeah. That was a tough pill. We barely discussed it, like the decision was made without any real reason.”

“Of course.”

“A week has past, and it still feels unreal. Imagine leaving a position you’ve had for years without the ritual of leaving, you know? No telling your boss, no wrapping up cases, no goodbye drinks. Just one day you’re not there anymore. It’s so . . . bloodless.” He tapped his glasses against the sheets.

“Have you told Catarina you feel that?”

“What would the point be? We can’t go back.”

“Funny, for most irreversible medical events, you lose something. There’s no ready protocol for addition. As your friend, I hope you talk to your wife as openly as possible, and trust that communication will lead to good decisions. Hopefully, the three of you can make a path.”

“I appreciate that.” He shifted on the bed, feeling uneasy in his skin. “I’m afraid if we dig too far into it, if we communicate, the right thing will be for one of us to step aside and leave. Already it feels like that person is going to be me, that I’m the one who feels the most outside of our established routines.”

“I hope you can work something sustainable out.” She put her pen down. “Anything else?”

He shook his head without meeting her eyes.

“Come on. Everyone’s waiting.”

He didn’t meet her eyes as they walked back out to the group.

\* \* \*

Joyce nodded to Catarina as she emerged with Arturo. This interview had taken slightly longer than Leo’s, and Catarina sensed the small crowd’s impatience. Sweat glistened on everyone, and she worried that Alessandro might pass out from the heat, so she pushed him to drink water. Alessandro was a bedroom drunk, preferring cheap grappa or whiskey. He’d keep dry for months then abruptly break. In this case, the duplication was the obvious relapse trigger.

Joyce stepped in front of everyone.

“Alright, thanks, everyone for your patience waiting while I interviewed Leonard and, well, other Leonard. Mr. Galletti, Mrs. Galletti, Dean, I recognize you all from the wedding. Thanks for coming, though I didn’t plan on speaking to a group, and you should understand that I’m a psychiatrist who is currently studying the impact of environmental toxins on childhood development. So I’m not an expert in duplication phenomenon, but few others are, either.”

Leo and Arturo leaned more closely against the brick wall by the door, as if trying to camouflage themselves.

“Is it radiation?” Alessandro asked.

“There’s no connection to radiation I’ve heard.”

“What’s wrong with my son?”

“Nothing, medically speaking. The local clinic cleared him physically. Nor is he manifesting any mental illness that I see, beyond common reactions to a shock that should fade as time passes. Frankly, I’d be more troubled if those didn’t present.”

“Then, why did he duplicate?” Alessandro asked.

Joyce breathed in heavily. “That is the question, isn’t it? Okay, to begin, this isn’t researched much. We’ve seen some genetic pre-disposition in twins, and some connection to high stress stimuli, particularly when the stress comes simultaneously from both collective and personal experiences—during riots, war, earthquakes, and so forth, paired with a personal event like a death or career failure. We’ve even seen reports of positive events like V-Day and reunited families. It could be these interact with other environmental factors we haven’t discovered yet such as toxins or radiation. Some other extreme theories are floating out there that I can’t disprove, such as duplicates jumping in from an alternative universe where, right now, there’s another Catarina searching for her husband. Given Leo and Arturo’s own recollections from the night, I find this, and other radical theories, doubtful.”

Catarina imagined a corresponding alternative-universe Catarina waking up on the couch still shaken from the riots, searching the small apartment for her inexplicably absent husband, calling his family and friends, then the police officer visit. As the storyline played out, Catarina wanted to comfort her. She breathed in and squeezed both Leo and Arturo’s hands simultaneously. They each squeezed back, Arturo a little tighter.

“Something approximating duplication happens in nature a lot. Blueberry plants reproduce like this. Splitting can be a form of asexual reproduction. Individual cells in healthy humans do this all the time too, through a process called mitosis.

“This process can happen to an organism as complex as a human.” She gestured to Arturo and Leo, who both waved meekly. “A duplication was even captured on video: the infamous Barren Brothers tape. Something triggered every somatic cell—that is, all the cells inside Leonard’s body—to spontaneously divide, to undergo mitosis. That means sometime while he slept, each of Leonard’s cells copied his DNA inside them so they have two complete, identical sets—call it the ‘A-Set’ and the ‘B-Set.’ Then, rapidly, each cell cleaved down the middle and split, so each ends up the same as it started. For at least some time, those cells were right next to each other and Leo and Arturo briefly shared the same body.

“The A-Set and the B-Set cells are identical but they have opposite polarity, like mirror images of each other, and this asymmetry seems to draw them in opposite directions. The cells seem to know they need to migrate apart quickly to survive. How the migration actually happens physically is something we don’t know and probably won’t know until we can witness the process in a mammal under lab conditions. But the cells seem to generate some filaments on their leading edge that allows them to move along the intercellular scaffolding at an unusually rapid pace.

“It’s possible the body preps the environment for the duplication using some kind of viscous solution throughout the body between cells, like the womb does to ease birth.

“So that’s what I’ve been able to learn. Questions?” Joyce’s bright, gap-tooth smile suggested a student who felt hopeful about her class presentation.

Catarina scanned the room. Everyone other than Joyce looked engaged but puzzled. Arturo coughed.

“Which one’s the original?” Alessandro asked.

“Great question,” Joyce said like an encouraging teacher. “Neither or both. Biological duplications result in a lot of noise. So, maybe one has a few stray double cells left or maybe some cells didn’t migrate, but if you could somehow compare them both to Leonard from last week, all three would be different in minute ways—in the past, we’ve found all distinct fingerprints, or sometimes you can have complications where a frontal lobe splits improperly so you have marked personality shifts. That’s part of why I spoke to them alone. I couldn’t detect a difference in their bodies, memories or personality beyond reasonable divergences likely due to events subsequent to the split. I don’t believe Catarina has witnessed anything either.”

Catarina shook her head.

“So,” Joyce said, “for all practical purposes, they were the same person immediately after they split.”

“Can it be reversed?” Linda asked.

“No. Even if you could somehow reverse the physical process, they were the same person immediately after they split *but* they’ve been experiencing life separately since then, so you’d have to house two separate sets of memories in one person. They’re not still experiencing the same things, and I don’t believe their minds are even subconsciously connected. For example, I ran a simple test on Leo: I associated the act of putting a hand on a leg and applying a mild shock using this joy buzzer. High-tech modern stuff I know.” She revealed a hand buzzer that a clown might use. “When I then did the same thing with Arturo, he didn’t react in a way suggesting he was anticipating a shock.”

“What are the chances of him duplicating a second time?” Catarina asked.

“I don’t know.” Joyce’s voice softened. “I haven’t read of any cases of multiple duplication. And there are signs that the propensity is passed genetically. So his—your future kids could. Anything else?”

Alessandro raised his hand. "Who are you again?"

"Joyce. An old friend of Catarina's. We met at Barnard."

"Joyce," Alessandro said, "have you considered that this could be an experiment of the CIA's DS&T to create Manchurian Candidates or perhaps abduct political opponents or other information targets who they can then torture for information and then kill with no one knowing?"

Dean nodded along. Catarina, inspired by Joyce's mention of divergences, instead studied Arturo and Leo for differences. In addition to being clean-shaven, Arturo had a slight tan from his week off. Both were giving their father the same skeptical expression.

"What-are-ya-doing?" Linda asked her husband.

"I'm asking questions about my son," Alessandro said.

"The CIA isn't involved. You're drunk."

"Can you let her answer? I had two drinks because I'm stressed because my son split into two people, and I only learned about it a week after it happened. That's fair. Joyce, is that fair? Do I seem drunk to you?"

"You seem tipsy but cogent," Joyce said.

He turned to Linda. "I'm tipsy but cogent. Can I keep going?"

Linda gave an exaggerated wave.

Alessandro turned back to Joyce. "So, tell me, Joyce, is the CIA involved?"

"Mr. Galletti, it's a spontaneous phenomenon. I haven't heard of anyone inducing duplication and the logistics required would seem impossible without your son knowing."

"What about the Tuskegee syphilis experiment, what they did to those black boys in the south? Those awful things."

"I hear you, Mr. Galletti. I can't say 100% that the government wasn't involved, but I can't imagine the government wanting to do this without lab conditions even if such means existed."

Joyce took this in stride but Catarina was embarrassed to see her friend questioned like this. Thankfully, Alessandro leaned back, satisfied.

“I’ve got one,” Dean asked, speaking for the first time. “Who gets Catarina?” His tone was joking-but-not-joking.

No one reacted immediately, and only when awkward laughter followed did Catarina know for sure he’d really said it out loud rather than her vividly imagining something. Dean’s fierce loyalty towards Leonard sometimes came out in sharp ways. She’d always felt his aloof friendliness towards her masked a suspicion. This felt rooted in their first meeting when he commented on her expensive shoes. He evoked Philly boys from her old neighborhood with class-envy chips on their shoulder.

“That’s beyond science,” Joyce said, clapping her hands together and keeping them squeezed, “and up to Catarina.”

Catarina felt everyone’s expectant eyes.

“I’ll speak to Dean’s question,” Leo said with slight cockiness. “We have a call scheduled with Cat’s father Pedro this evening. It will be settled by a dowry action. Arturo and I have spent the last week collecting shekels, sheep and livestock for the bride price. May the best Leonard win.”

Even Dean laughed. Catarina couldn’t feel the humor. In its place was a numb irritation vaguely directed at Dean and herself. Leo was speaking Catarina’s thoughts about the old-fashioned assumptions in Dean’s question. On the other hand, if Catarina had defended herself the message would carry more force.

She brushed Leo’s knuckles lightly, then said, “Thank you, Joyce, for that exegesis. I know this was a lot to prepare. And thanks, Alessandro, for those helpful questions, and to Dean for his description of me as chattel. We all have much to consider.”

Joyce said, “I have some research that I’ll leave with you, and I’d actually like to have a quick word in private.”

Catarina led Joyce back to their bedroom, and Leo and Arturo followed.

“Listen,” Joyce said as soon as they were alone, “have you heard of the Minnesota Starvation Experiment? It happened towards the end of World War II. Well-intended American scientists wanted to study the effects of starvation, so they brought in a bunch of conscientious objectors. Quakers and the like. You had to volunteer, but they wanted to teach scientists how to help Holocaust victims when they liberated the camps. They put the subjects on famine-like diets and made them keep journals. They went crazy, participants eating out of the trash, cutting off their fingers and not even knowing if they did it on purpose.”

“Why are you telling us this?” asked Leo.

“My colleagues would kill me, but your father’s right to be paranoid. Tuskegee did happen. But the risk isn’t that they already did something to you. It’s that you’ll end up guinea pigs to people with good intentions. Just lay low. If any scientist, military or otherwise, comes around asking you to join an experiment, tell them politely to fuck off.”

“Are you saying we should go into hiding?”

“No, no, no. You’re not so unique that folks are going to come around and try to dissect you. Rumors are that you weren’t even the only ones to duplicate this blackout,” Joyce said. “But someone could try to make their reputation off studying him. Sadly, I wouldn’t put much past scientists. I’m not a conspiracy person, but becoming an object of well-intended scientific curiosity is sometimes as dangerous as secret military compounds.” Joyce eyed the two of them like lab specimens.

Catarina’s thoughts flashed to Joyce’s offhand mentioning of giving Leo a light shock to test his response. Catarina placed herself protectively in front of Leo and Arturo. “Maybe you’re projecting your own interest a bit?”

“Of course I’m interested in them scientifically, in addition to personal concern—what if the phenomenon is a result of toxins nobody has seen? But I’d be ethical.” Joyce paused, catching herself, then looked down and drew back. “Sorry if I sound too curious.”

“I’m being ungrateful,” Catarina said. “I appreciate you coming.”

“Wait, one more thing,” Arturo said. “Could you put us in touch with other duplicates?”

“Start with the Barren Brothers. Their act is still going in Coney Island. They’re the highest-profile duplicates.” She waved to the Leo’s parents, who stood awkwardly in response. “Thank you for your questions!” Alessandro nodded in acknowledgment.

They hugged Joyce goodbye.

“I’ll be right back,” Catarina said, touching Leo’s chest, then Arturo’s.

“I love you,” they whispered, one by one, and she whispered it back.

Dean caught up with them halfway down the first stairwell.

“Hey Cat!” he said, unrolling the cigarette pack from his sleeve, and held out a loosie.

Catarina glanced at Joyce then back at the entrance to the stairwell, then took the cigarette and nodded in thanks. Among the small bonds she and Dean shared was semi-conspiratorial smoking together, risking Leonard’s judgment. He offered Joyce one as well, but she said, “I don’t smoke.”

“Crazy situation,” he said.

“Yeah,” Catarina said, and waited for more. When he didn’t add anything, she said, “Thanks,” lifted the cigarette in goodbye and continued down the stairs.

\* \* \*

Joyce and Catarina went to the unnamed taqueria two blocks south. The space had a mechanical grain mill for tortillas and a rotating pastry display case. The waiter lit the cigarette Catarina bummed from Dean.

Catarina ordered a fresh juice and a fish taco platter, except the place near the university served french fries instead of mashed plantains. Joyce asked for a margarita, and Catarina switched her juice to beer.

“That was as close as Dean gets to apologizing,” Catarina said, looking at the cigarette.

“To in-laws,” Joyce said, clinking glasses. “Especially Mr. Galletti, calling out shady scientists everywhere.”

“What a character. You know, at my first wedding Duncan’s mother told me that no matter how she acted in public, I’d never be a member of the family. At my second wedding, Alessandro pulled me aside and said, ‘Catarina, I’m Marxist enough that I’m not sure I believe in the concept of marriage, but you seem like a good person and you make my son happy, so come over for Sunday dinner when you can.’ I bawled, and he had no idea what to do. He doesn’t touch people, so he just stood there until I stopped crying.”

“That’s amazing. Now I really mean it, then: to Mr. Galletti. May he never change.”

They toasted a second time.

“How’s your son, your husband? Everyone still one person?” Catarina asked.

“Fine, fine, you know,” Joyce said. “Nobody has duplicated, though I’m not sure I’d notice if my husband did. He’s always on his boat. That’s what I get, marrying a boat fanatic. But he loves fatherhood like you wouldn’t believe.” *Fatherhood* was said with an exhausted pride that approached smugness. Catarina felt a vicarious maternal rush. This business with Arturo and Leo complicated an already delayed timeline.

“I’m so happy that your family is thriving.”

“Thanks,” Joyce said. Unspoken was an old promise to raise children around the same time, so their kids could be friends.

They were silent until the food came. Many biological questions drifted in and out but finally Catarina asked, “Why Leo and not me? If anything, he handles the pressures of the world better, makes a joke at setbacks.”

“Genetics?” Joyce said playfully, as if she’d said ‘magic.’ “He said you two fought the night before the split.”

Catarina looked away, then told Joyce about her career malaise and the talk of moving. “I actually felt better after, but maybe those conversations cut him deeper.”

“Did you get the vibe he was keeping stress hidden?”

Catarina shook her head no. “In the lead up, he seemed calm and solid as always.” That he might be harboring stress irked her. *What did he have to be stressed about? His job and family were easier to navigate.* “He can often do a low-level mind reading into my moods, and I hate that I can’t do the same with him, because he does hide his stress. He’s been a little withdrawn, but that could mean a lot of things.”

“Such as?”

“Anytime there’s a heavy conversation, he retreats into himself for a few days. That used to frighten me—I worried his interest was evaporating—but eventually I stopped reading into it.”

“Don’t kill yourself,” Joyce said. “Men are terrible at expressing emotions.”

“It’s going to be more work now, engaging and drawing him out when he has funks. And at some point, their needs are going to diverge more, right? Already, Leo has their old job, Arturo doesn’t.” She looked elsewhere. “What’s bizarre is that I’m a little annoyed. He gets to try a new life, new jobs, work in a bike shop—live two lives and see what suits him, while I’m wasting away trying drug cases.”

Concern drained from Joyce’s face, shifting to a flatter expression. “I don’t sense he’s enjoying this.”

“I sound petty,” Catarina backpedaled.

“What would you want to try?”

“Not a bike shop.”

“Bike shops can be fun.”

“I don’t know what I want. The D.A.’s Office has warped my perceptions. Each day I need to be this perfect dutiful soldier and I feel like I’ve lost myself a bit.” Catarina told Joyce the story of the kid with who stole the synthesizer: how she gave him easy bail, but then felt pressured by the judge to apply absurd bail conditions for the rest of the day.

“That’s messed up,” Joyce said. “Isn’t that illegal?”

“Not how he did it. He implied I was being soft and I need to appear in front of him all the time. I can’t do my job if he doesn’t respect me. It’s not me, or how I’d act in a vacuum, but I need to do something like that at work almost every day to be effective. I’m afraid that who I need to be at work is becoming more who I am every day, and I’m feeling less conflicted by it each time.” To her own surprise, Catarina wept.

“Oh, it’s okay. It’s okay,” Joyce said, taking Catarina’s hand.

Catarina held back tears with a swig of beer. “Now, this split on top of everything. It’s disorienting to have basic conversations, like how your day was, twice. And I can feel their stress. I have to navigate their moods and be slightly different with each, because they already have different needs competing for my attention.” The tears grew heavy enough that she couldn’t keep speaking. Joyce came around the table and cradled her head awkwardly. Catarina gently pushed her back after a second.

“Enough of that,” Catarina said. She bit into her taco. “*Dios mio*, this tastes so good.” They ate in silence until Catarina reluctantly put down the taco. Leonard didn’t eat meat, and out of respect she only occasionally indulged. “Do you think leaving one would be ethical?”

“Marriage isn’t a suicide pact. You can get out before life crashes. A patient of mine once left his wife because she had bad breath, so you’re ahead of him at least. I think you need to ask, what do you want?”

Catarina looked at the burned-out buildings outside the taqueria. On the sidewalk was a square of shattered glass still holding the shape of car window, but the car was gone, its owner perhaps now driving to a new home in the suburbs with flapping plastic covering the window, happily done with the New York City part of his life.

“I found out Duncan finally sold our old apartment,” Catarina said, “for a million dollars. I quit-claimed it during the divorce, and so I got nothing.”

“Regrets?”

“None. But I thought Leonard and I would be able to rebuild that life for ourselves faster. Now, I don’t think we’ll ever have a million-dollar apartment, which is totally fine, but at least I need to have my marriage not destroy my career. I change my mind every hour about how to protect us from that. The idea of leaving either of them after everything . . . What would you do?”

Joyce raised her eyebrows and smiled broadly, showcased her gap tooth. “Whatever seems most disastrous.”

“No, you wouldn’t! You’re always so clear-headed.”

“Pfff. Maybe when it comes to other’s lives. I’d probably move to a new town and handpick some meek second woman to live next door with one of them, as a cover.”

Catarina let go of Joyce’s hands, and laughed, wiping her eyes. “That’s your recommendation? Add more people?”

“Yes. And move to Philly!” Joyce nodded eagerly. “I don’t know—I won’t judge, whatever route you pick. Just be discreet until you decide; there’s no need to risk public judgment until you know for sure what you want.”

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Leo and Arturo's family had cleared out by the time Catarina returned. She was slightly tipsy and in a fresh, good mood.

Both were currently on the couch reading the material Joyce had left.

"I stopped for a cigarette," she confessed. Leonard had long pushed her to quit, terrified she'd get cancer.

Neither of them commented. They both scratched their shoulders and avoided her eyes.

"What's going on?" she asked.

"Nothing," Leo said without looking up. "Joyce say anything interesting?"

"That we should find another woman to keep up appearances," she said, trying to lighten the mood. Leo raised his eyebrow.

Everyone went silent. They looked washed out, almost indifferent. His habit of emotionally withdrawing was her least favorite trait. Maybe they'd hoped for more from Joyce. She'd need to do something special for Arturo since he was the one out of a job, but she didn't have it in her, today, to reach out for him in his withdrawn place. She felt drained just being in the room.

She placed the pack of cigarettes on the kitchen counter. Then she showered and put on a glossy black dressing gown with orange Asian-style dragons. She'd picked it out without checking the cost during the early heady days of her first marriage. The robe was a little threadbare from age, but still elegant and Leonard liked her in it. She returned to the kitchen, hoping the atmosphere there might have changed.

"Here, look at this," Leo said. He gave her an old copy of *Genetics Quarterly*. "And for lighter reading there's this—it's semi-literate but interesting." He gave her a pulp-covered paperback entitled *Two! The Shocking Lives of the Barren Brothers!*

She climbed onto the kitchen counter near their sink, and opened the window overlooking fire escapes and brick walls so she could blow smoke out the window.

The first article was maddeningly short, almost skeletal; and the *Genetics Quarterly* equivalent of a *Dear Abby* column. A reader asked, “I recently visited the Coney Island Freakshow, and watched a video of a duplicate. My husband thought the video was faked, soviet style. It was grainy, but looked real to me. Is spontaneous duplication real?”

The *Genetic Quarterly* expert responded:

Various reports throughout history suggested its existence, including the famous Barren Brothers vaudeville act in Coney Island that you likely witnessed. The Barren Brothers were long assumed to be a harmless fraud—twins trying to build more excitement into their shtick—because they never allowed the footage itself to be duplicated or studied by medical experts. They are now believed by many in the scientific community to be the authentic article content to let their audiences believe they are frauds.

Long dismissed as too rare to usefully study, the duplication phenomenon appears to be increasing or at least is becoming better reported and recognized. About 3% of births result in dizygotic fraternal twins and 0.3% of births result in monozygotic identical twins, while the best data suggest only 0.003% of the population will ever duplicate. However, with the world becoming smaller each day, the potential for duplicates to teach us even more about nature versus nurture is ever increasing. Significantly more studies are warranted with respect to these rare humans.

Catarina’s legal mind replaced “with respect to these rare humans” in the final line with “on these rare specimens.” She tossed her cigarette into the sink, rubbed her upper lip and considered. She could make copies to share when she told others. Arturo and Leo were silently reading other materials, their body language suggesting a sour mood. They wouldn’t respond well to interruption.

She lit another cigarette and turned to *Two! The Shocking Lives of the Barren Brothers!* The book was thin; its pulp cover was reminiscent of a carnival ad, a shouting man in the middle of a circus ring splitting into two identical parts, each with the same flashy suit. Inside a red star was the promise *100% True!* and a second star proclaimed *Tell-All!!!* The back cover claimed it was a biography of the Barren Brothers written by their illegitimate son.

The opening pages were full of typos and sentence fragments. In one place, a whole paragraph was repeated. The Barren Brothers claimed they were duplicates rather than twins. They had become famous by being the first to have captured footage of their duplication, recorded in grainy black and white for a campus sleep deprivation study before they had any carnival ambitions (and when the two of them were just one broke Brooklyn College student seeking pocket money). They stole the only copy of the footage from the campus lab, and began showing the footage as the centerpiece of a vaudeville performance during Coney Island's freakshow. Over the years, the performance evolved to include comedy, light acrobatics and reading of each other's minds, each piece riffing on their unnatural coordination and the sameness of their thoughts.

Even padded out with chapters about life before duplication and other freakshows, the book was thin, and contained no medical evidence or description of the duplication's actual effects.

Catarina sighed. The three hadn't spoken in almost an hour. She got down from the counter and threw out the rest of her cigarettes.

She pulled a chair up and sat across from them. They put down what they were reading and exchanged an unreadable look.

"Don't do that look thing," Catarina said. "It's creepy and it's like when I speak Spanish with my mom in front of you. English please."

"Let's stop keeping this secret. It's not worth the stress," Arturo said.

"We're keeping it private, not secret. There's a difference. Your family knows, Joyce knows. My mom now."

"I'm not saying call the newspapers, but being open will make finding a new job easier for me."

"You want to tell more people because you know that the more people we tell while we're living together, the more likely I stay with you both. The stigma will already have happened."

“What stigma? You saw Joyce, my family. They’re concerned for our health but people come around. Who are these boogiemens?”

“Everyone else! Especially my job. We told those people because we knew they wouldn’t judge. But, watch, my mom is going to flip out when she gets that letter. Think of your brother with his ‘who gets Cat?’ comment.”

“He was joking.”

“He wasn’t joking. Even our tolerant friends are asking themselves how we’ll arrange this, they’re just more polite than Dean,” she said. With a frantic air, she went through the garbage, took out her crumpled cigarette packet and tried lighting one. A cherry flared but the cigarette fell apart at the middle, half-broken. She stomped out the fallen half then threw the rest into the sink.

“Goddamn it!” she said, directing her swearing into the basin. “Stop staring like that. It’s been, what, a week, and you want to rush into something that we can’t undo if it goes bad. We should be doing the opposite. Protect ourselves if this does get out. I should move out.” She said ‘move out’ with soft uncertainty, her own conclusion catching her off-guard, but the solution seemed right, and she added more confidently: “I’m moving out for a while.”

Still seated at the couch, their eyes followed her closely. She calmed, and brushed ashes from her bathrobe. “Cat,” they said, vulnerability in their eyes.

“This is too strange. I need space. My own apartment.” She sighed, returned to her seat, touched each of their hands. They tensed. “I’m not leaving either of you. I’ll come visit, you’ll come visit. Something cheap. A cold water flat downtown maybe, a room near the office.”

“Moving out is a bad idea,” Arturo said.

“Just until we figure out something better,” she said, “Don’t you see? We can’t make smart decisions sharing a bed.”

“Our bodies know things that we don’t sometimes. This feels right,” Arturo said. “We’re not hormone-mad teenagers.”

“We’ve established that we can make the bedroom work with three of us, but that can’t overwhelm all other factors,” she said. “I don’t feel certain like you, and I can’t keep perspective with us all on top of each other. This place is too small for three people. You’ve got to push the damned washing machine into the kitchen to take a shower, then in front of the bathroom to cook a meal. I can’t hear myself think. I need some time to be an individual again and really decide what I want, who I am—if I’m a woman who can handle two husbands. And maybe you both need space to hear yourselves too.”

They nodded, seemingly wanting to say more in their fidgety stances, but letting everything sink in.

Finally, Arturo said, “I’m afraid of losing you.” They didn’t say it together, which lessened the alienation effect, but why had Arturo said this and not Leo? Why was Arturo more afraid of losing her?

She touched his jawline. “I just need space; will you give me space, my love?” she asked, letting her hand drop down and rub Arturo’s leg. “This feels weird to you guys too, right? Weird, and harder to connect. Everything is going to be heightened for a while, and we’ll need to pace ourselves. You’re going to need space too, from me and each other.” They squeezed her hands, and she removed them, closed her bathrobe tighter so they wouldn’t misunderstand.

“Okay, I’m going for more cigarettes. I might stay with a friend tonight, so don’t send out a brigade if I don’t come back,” she said. “I’ll call tomorrow to check in.” She headed for the bedroom to change.

She went around the block, bought a loopy cigarette but struggled to light it with shaky hands. What friend could she go to without causing further drama? A cheap hotel was a

possibility, though that cost money. It was getting late. She couldn't believe she had to wake up and go to work tomorrow. Weighing reputation and cost in her decisions was getting old.

In the end, she smoked, returned home, silently threw her work clothes on the couch, and knowing she wouldn't fall asleep, went for a brief run in Central Park until her emotions ebbed a bit. The brief exercise was enough to steady her.

When she returned, the bedroom door was closed but she sensed them behind it. In the bedroom her two husbands were in bed but not sleeping. Seeing them sharing one bed without her there was odd, each lying on opposite sides on their backs, doing nothing but thinking, a blank space about her size between them.

She readied for bed and slipped into that space.

"I'm still moving," she said. "Just not tonight."

## Chapter Seven

The next day, Catarina arrived to work late and poorly rested. She blew the whole morning resolving where she could move without depleting their limited savings. Her secretary Daisy saw her going through rental listings from several papers. Catarina covered smoothly, saying her friend was in a tough spot. Catarina was saved because Daisy's younger cousin abruptly left town after the riots, leaving a vacant space until the end of the summer.

After this, Catarina turned to the detective's report in the Lucas case. She needed to read it several times to absorb it. He'd tracked down some answers: Lucas had a girlfriend; his family didn't have much money; he had high grades in math, less good in English though he could speak and understand English better than he'd let on during the interrogation; he'd had a few fights at school since moving to the United States two years ago, but no gang activity. "Heightened adrenaline" was detective's explanation as to how Lucas moved a body in his post-split state.

Finding an apartment allowed Catarina some relief until she returned from lunch, and found her mother Carmen had left four messages. She'd received Catarina's letter about the duplication. Catarina didn't have energy left to call back, but did so anyway, standing with her head pushed against a wall. Carmen unleashed a flood of questions in Spanish that Catarina couldn't answer.

"I'm just worried about you, butterfly," her mother said.

Catarina hung up and said to Maddie, "I'm too tired to deal with this."

"What's up?" Maddie said. She'd been pretending not to listen.

"My mom is just worried about Leo," Catarina said.

"He okay?"

"He's okay. Can we get a drink after work?"

Deputy O'Donnell knocked on their door. "A.D.A. Galletti—when you have a chance," he said from the hall without opening the door. *When you have a chance* meant *now* unless you had an urgent matter. "Sorry, Maddie, I need to borrow your girlfriend."

"I'll call and let *Home* know I'll be late." *Home* was code for Susan, Maddie's wife.

She collected her Lucas files and headed to O'Donnell office right after.

"What are we doing? I just heard he's still in the holding pen without charges. You write up an indictment?"

She handing him the list of charges. "The defense asked for a plea deal before we indict so they can avoid the press coverage, which might make a plea harder politically."

"He's right about that. Press attention can take cases out of our hands, particularly in a mayoral election year. What else?"

"I've been going back and forth. Something's nagging me, say we should wait and investigate more. There's a medium-sized hole in the kid's story. It's huge, but he says he carried his duplicate's body to the basement of an abandoned house. How does he do that having just lost half of his body mass? Wouldn't he be weak?" She swayed her head back and forth. "But then, the kid confessed and showed us a body we'd never have looked for, so I don't know what else we need."

"So you're suggesting what? Someone helped him?"

"I'm not suggesting anything. I'm trying to understand the logistics. The piece I'm missing."

"Half our cases have missing pieces. Maybe adrenaline like the detective says, or the body sits there in his personal bathtub for a day or so while the kid gets stronger."—Both O'Donnell and Catarina had been surprised Lucas had his own bathroom; the family clearly had gotten some of their wealth out of Argentina when fleeing—"Like you said, you have the confession. What's your recommendation?"

"On balance, we offer a plea deal."

“And miss the fun *Post* headlines?” O’Donnell asked.

Catarina’s face dropped.

“I’m kidding,” he said, “that’s fine. Who’s this attorney again?”

“Stanley Shapiro.”

“The one who does the weird bowing thing when he leaves?”

“That’s him.”

“Odd duck. He’s got an office in Chinatown. Solo practitioner who writes his briefs on a typewriter from the 20s. Doesn’t even have a secretary. Likes to hit the NYPD with impact litigation lawsuits about its broad policies practices even though he doesn’t have the resources to try them effectively. Juries love him—find his eccentricities charming. What do you want to offer?”

“Ten years, probation eligible after five.”

“We could get better.”

“He’s a kid, emotionally. It was an extreme position.”

He chewed his pen, and stared at the indictment for clues. Leo and Arturo were a shadow at the edge of her thoughts as she waited for his response, the concealment of it. *I didn’t disclose Leo’s duplication because it was irrelevant to my prosecutorial judgment*, she thought. Duplication was common enough to happen several times this riot alone. Leo and Arturo hadn’t hurt anybody—if anything her personal exposure made her more qualified. Still, a plea would simplify going fully public with those matters. She hoped that he approved the plea offer, but also knew she’d miss a career-bolstering opportunity.

“Fuck it,” O’Donnell said. “Let’s see how desperate they are. Offer fifteen and eight to start, and then use your judgment to go down if Shapiro haggles. Stewy won’t have a problem with that.”

Everyone referenced the district attorney by his first name.

\* \* \*

Returning to her office, she found a note from Maddie saying she'd left for the pub.

First, she called Shapiro, and shared the plea offer of ten years with probation possible after five—skipping O'Donnell's harsher offer—plus dropping the murder charge to first degree manslaughter. "Thank you, Ms. Galletti. Thank you. Thank you," he said, before they hung up. She could hear Shapiro half-bowing over the phone as he said it.

Catarina called Arturo at Jackie's Bikes.

"Clean-shaven Leonard," Arturo said after hearing her voice.

"I know who you are, love," she said, smiling. Then, she remembered last night's fight and the smile dropped. "Arturo, I'm telling Maddie after work." She used his new name deliberately, wanting it to stick.

"Good, great," he said. "Want me there?"

"I can handle this one. I'm also moving this evening. Could you bring a few things?"

"How is that possible so quickly?" he said, emotion drained from his voice.

"I told my secretary I had a friend in a tough spot."

He was silent.

"It's temporary. Furnished, so I won't need much."

"Okay," he said in a low voice. "We're making a mistake, though, not telling everyone. Telling half the people never ends well."

"We'll be careful who we tell. Just people we can trust. And thanks. I can tell you're pissed off at me, but this is what I need right now."

"I'm not pissed off. I'm hurt you're moving out," he said.

He often said he was hurt when he didn't know he was pissed off. "Okay, and I'm sorry, but just do this for me and we'll work through this a day at a time."

As Catarina stood to leave, Shapiro called back and said Lucas had rejected the plea.

“You’re kidding,” Catarina said, her tiredness leaking through. “After that lobbying for a plea offer before indictment? Now, I’ll have to indict tomorrow and all you accomplished was delaying bail. Do you really think you’ll do better at trial?”

“The kid decided he doesn’t want it. He’s the client,” Shapiro said, his irritated tone hinted that he’d advised Lucas to take the plea.

As soon as she hung up, she headed out to catch Maddie at the bar before someone else stopped her.

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The walls of the Metropolitan were adorned with paraphernalia from old officers, along with a smattering of Irish nationalist items and old Guinness ads. Sawdust covered the floor. The place was deserted except for an old man—likely an out-of-uniform officer—who sat at the corner of the bar hunched over his drink, eyes fixed on a Yankee game.

Maddie arrived late, ordered a double whiskey, put her hands behind her head, then leaned back and said, “Feels like the end of the world, so we may as well do what we want for a time. You look terrible. Are you getting enough sleep?”

Catarina had been nursing her beer, and wanted to mirror Maddie’s lead and switch to whiskey, but her budget held her back. This led to thoughts about how they would pay for everything on their salaries, whether Arturo sought take inconspicuous work, and what that might look like. Maddie’s concerned expression refocused her attention. “Leo duplicated,” Catarina said.

“Jesus! Like Lucas?” Maddie rubbed her face. “When?”

“Right after the riots.”

“Holy shit. Fuck. How is he? They?”

“Fine. Healthy. One of them kept his job, the other is working today at Jackie’s Bikes with Dean, just to do something. I’m calling them Leo and Arturo.”

Maddie shot her drink, wiped her mouth and gestured to the bartender.

“Well, that’s less dramatic than Lucas. How are you holding up?”

“It’s a lot of masculine energy.”

“You must be so sore.” Maddie’s eyes widened at her own words. “Sorry, that was tactless.”

Catarina waved this away. “The problem isn’t the physical attention. He’s just so *there*.”

“Huh,” Maddie said, leaning back again and examined Catarina closely. “Are you hiding a hickey with makeup? Are we in high school?”

Catarina blushed and covered the incriminating part of her neck. “I’m moving to Brooklyn tonight, temporarily, to have some space while I figure things out.”

Maddie nodded.

The bartender approached and asked, “Anything else, ladies?”

“You grow up in New York?” Catarina asked, sizing him up.

The bartender nodded. “Park Slope, Brooklyn, born and raised.”

Catarina tapped Maddie playfully. “If my friend Maddie can guess the first six numbers of your childhood phone, can we get a free round? If she can’t, we tip double.”

“I’ll take that on,” bartender said.

“I’m not in the mood,” Maddie said.

“Please?”

Maddie nodded in reluctant acquiesce.

Catarina turned to the bartender. “What’s the cross street?”

“Fourteen Street, right by the park.”

Catarina and the bartender looked at Maddie expectantly.

“718-436, probably.”

“Bollocks! That’s still my mom’s number. Someone put you up to that? You some kind of savant?”

Maddie smiled proudly.

“Nah,” Catarina said. “Just had a college job with a local telecommunications company, and her mind decided to permanently store once useful information.”

“Got you free drinks, so it’s still useful.” He poured two generous whiskey pours, and took his leave.

“So, back to this situation,” Catarina said. “Should I tell O’Donnell?”

“If you want to be fired, sure.” Maddie leaned forward again. “Go ahead and invite him to the second wedding. All good in the eyes of the Lord.”

“I’m afraid he’ll hear from someone else.”

Maddie sipped her beer and considered this. “Who knows so far? Leonard’s work?”

“Not yet. Still not worth it,” Catarina said. “O’Donnell might react okay. He’s a good boss.”

“O’Donnell is a good boss because O’Donnell likes you. And he likes you because of that cross around your neck. You’re like his daughter. Don’t put that thought in his head.”

“You’re overreacting,” she said, though she agreed with Maddie. Something in her wanted to play devil’s advocate and see how Maddie might respond to Leo and Arturo’s arguments.

“He’s weirder than he looks. Once I was waiting to meet with him, needed a pen, checked his desk drawer and the inside was full of those matchbooks with dirty pictures and those half-folded dollars advertising phone sex, you know the ones that have a vagina where Washington should be?”

Catarina’s head jerked involuntarily. “That’s unexpected, but is it relevant here?”

“There’s other things. He’s tied to Koch’s mayoral campaign, right? Have you seen him how defensively he reacts to the homosexuality rumors? He’s not saying that’s Koch’s personal business

or who gives a fuck. O'Donnell would sniff in real hard like he does, and say something like 'get that fucking slander out of here—my man's not like that.' There's real repugnance at the thought."

"I trust your instincts there. The church tends to implant that in people." Catarina had felt discomfort after learning about Maddie and Home, followed by concern for Maddie's soul and research into mortal sins, and finally adjustment of her worldview. "Father Torres is progressive about that, though."

"I get no negative vibe from Father Torres, and I like having O'Donnell as my supervisor. I'm just saying there's a lot about people that you don't see. You can't predict reactions, what's going to disgust them, and the risk is rarely worth taking. I've had plenty of experiences being disappointed by my fellow man, and also needing to keep secrets. I've known people who found secret ways to get identification when they changed genders. Maybe Arturo can do the same."

"It's not illegal to duplicate. Even if Arturo gets the paperwork done, it's not like they're going to report duplication to the D.A.'s Office, right? The risk is more a word-of-mouth."

Maddie sighed. "I don't know. If Arturo goes to work at a bike shop maybe this works. But he's not going to want to be there forever."

"Who's going to care?" Catarina asked.

"About your husband duplicating? Nobody really. About you having two husbands? Maybe more. People care about the dumb things. Remember we're only provisional members here."

Maddie gestured to her body. "Look at what they did when the cuts happened in '75. They used the budget to fire that antiwar marcher Tony, and Anatoly, just because of rumors that he was a queer communist. He wasn't either." She looked around and lowered her volume. "And that's just people getting cut. Look at who isn't getting promoted. Rick hit a ceiling. He only had a whiff of counterculture. Your saint O'Donnell bragged to me about not hiring a vegetarian. To advance, you

need people who are actively going to go to bat for you—someone needs to say ‘that’s my boy’—and they’re just not going to do that if they don’t see themselves in you.”

“They hired you,” Catarina said weakly.

“Because of you. And O’Donnell still gets shit from the other supervisors for taking on so many women. The hen house, they call our group. You need to be careful. And why did you say yes to that case? Are you crazy?”

“Why not take it? I’m O’Donnell’s only prosecutor who speaks Spanish.”

“We don’t have translators now? You didn’t want to disappoint O’Donnell.”

“Other prosecutors might not give the kid a fair shake.” Catarina’s eyes strayed up to the clock above the bar. “Drat, I need to meet Leo in Brooklyn at the new place. Let’s continue this discussion later.” She hugged Maddie awkwardly while Maddie remained seated.

“Fine. Send my love,” Maddie said.

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Earlier that afternoon, while Catarina was still at work, Arturo moved Catarina’s items into 109 Luquer Street in Carroll Gardens, an Italian neighborhood near downtown Brooklyn.

He collected the key from Catarina’s secretary, Daisy. The rental was Daisy’s cousin’s place. When Catarina had left Duncan, she hadn’t moved in with Leonard right away. Instead, he’d helped her move into a cheap, purgatorial apartment until matters settled down. She’d refused to bring a pillow for herself as an act of self-flagellation. He’d brought her one then, and he brought her one now.

As he biked, he noted her choice to delegate this task to him when she was the one who needed space. She didn’t have many options—but she could have done it alone. Something about being reduced to a servile role led him to call Augie Russo, the sole partner of Russo LLP, the small

Brooklyn personal injury firm where Leonard had worked while attending law school. They set up an early dinner.

Once everything was secure at the temporary apartment, he went down Luquer across the highway that separated the Carroll Gardens and Red Hook neighborhoods, where things were a little rougher, and continued to Defonte's Sandwich shop. The space was brightly lit and filled with cops, taxi drivers and longshoremen. Gaudy signs over the counter blared twenty different styles of Italian heroes: ham, salami, provolone, and vaguely-defined specials. Arturo ordered the potato and eggs, the only non-meat option for himself, and a pastrami-provolone for Augie, then waited in the corner.

After about ten minutes, Augie walked through the door. He was a short, dapper Italian, a childhood friend of Arturo's father. Arturo's first assignment for Augie was getting Friday lunch from Defonte's. Every day, each piece of mail sent to the office went to him first thing. Arturo's early work was to staple the envelope to the document and bring it to Augie, and watch him indicate who would take care of it and what to do. He was a workaholic, and the strain showed in the bags under his eyes. Finally, after Arturo's first law school grades came in through the roof, he was given real legal work.

"Prodigal son returns," Augie said, nodding and sizing Arturo up like he was looking for changes. "You look good, kid. Thanks for the call. You ordered?"

Arturo nodded, intuiting that word had reached Augie about the split. "How was your blackout?"

"You know, you'll laugh: we had to carry Nino down the stairs in his wheelchair. He swore the whole way down. Fuck this, fuck that—the ungrateful bastard."

"Did he drink a Manhattan Special while he swore?" In Arturo early days working at the firm, Nino constantly sent him to the bodega downstairs for espresso-soda.

Augie smiled. “He wishes. I should tell you: Alessandro shared your situation. I thought you might reach out.”

Arturo’s order was called, and he collected their heroes. Arturo’s potato-and-egg hero was amazingly cheesy, greasy and peppery.

“So, what is this?” Augie asked after taking his first bite. “This a social visit or are you coming back? Your father called upset about what happened. The thing.”

“Just for a while if you have it. Been picking up a few shifts at Jackie’s Bikes with Dean. I’m going a little nuts. Guess I’m a lawyer in my blood now.”

“Law is a jealous mistress, and makes you miss her fast. Things being what they are now, I can’t take you back full time. Office politics. I recently let Nino go.”

“Huh,” Arturo said. He thought Nino should have been fired years ago—he was a bad attorney and often made female clients feel uncomfortable.

“But I can give you some freelance work, loop you back in slowly and see where it goes. Just so we understand each other, how long is this for?”

“I’m not really sure. Six months to a year?”

Augie nodded a little sadly. He’d once offered Arturo a piece of the business if he stuck around after law school. “Makes sense. Why would you want to come back for longer than that? There’s only so many ways two cars can hit each other, right? Personal injury law gets repetitive and you start wanting to blow your brains out.” He made an explosion gesture near his temple and then shook his head.

“I’ve been thinking, what about something in government here in Brooklyn? Local politics or a state judgeship.”

“For that you’d need an organization backing you. You could follow me and join the Columbian Lawyers Association and that ladder. They’ve got a Columbus Day dinner—I can introduce you to some people. Second Monday in October.”

“They’re too old school to want me. A vegetarian who isn’t Catholic.”

“They don’t give a shit about that, they love all young Italian blood they can get, especially smart kids. To be honest, I’m often embarrassed in the people who rise up in the association, who we push; they’d be happy to have a kid from the top of his class. And you need them.” He swallowed another bite, then continued. “The way judicial appointments here work is first there’s a Jewish seat, then a black seat, maybe a woman, and eventually Columbian Lawyers get to put in a name. It’s not ideology; it’s any group that can raise the right dollar figure for the local Democratic party. But for you to be the guy an association pushes, you need to be involved.”

“Have you considered that route?”

“They’ve tried recruiting me, but the pay wasn’t there and I’m too much of a stand-up lawyer. As a judge, I’d want to jump over the bench and make the guy’s arguments for him.” He wiped his hands on a napkin, pulled an envelope from a breast pocket and placed it on the table. “You need a little advance to tide you over?”

Arturo shook his head.

“Take it anyway. Put it away quick, and don’t tell others in the office. Resentments.” He slid the envelope. Arturo peeked in. There were at least ten twenties. “Take it. I’m a good lawyer and a bad businessman. Get yourself a second pair of glasses. Maybe another suit. Can’t work with half a wardrobe.” Augie scratched his face and gestured with an open hand. “If you don’t mind me asking, where does all this put you with Catarina?”

“She moved out today, temporarily, to right down the street from here. I’m helping set up.”

Augie exhaled heavily. “My heart goes out to you. Be grateful there’s no kids. And hey, you haven’t dated since joining the bar, have you? You might find it different from dating as a car salesman.”

Augie’s unspoken assumption that the marriage was doomed was a gut punch. “I’m hoping we make it work,” Arturo said.

“Of course. I only meant: a man needs his own wife. With you being here looking for work, I thought maybe the coin toss went against you.”

“Nothing’s been decided. We might both stay with her.”

“That’s a hard road,” Augie said, rubbing his chin. “If you want some advice, forget government and forget Brooklyn. Your best move to win her back is to get out of Brooklyn’s provincial cesspool into a white-shoe Manhattan shop. That’s where the real money is.”

“I don’t see money moving the needle with Catarina.”

“Of course it will. With her, or with the next lady if you discover this both-of-you business isn’t for you. I’ve always said this: all things equal, women will choose the guy with the better job; they aren’t stupid like men. They don’t think they’re immortal like every goombah who barrels down Smith Street. Women ask themselves, ‘what if our kid gets sick and there’s no savings?’”

“Cat chose me over a rich guy,” Arturo said softly, with a defensive edge.

Augie crumbled up his hero wrapper and wiped his fingers with a napkin. “I suspect that wasn’t all other things being equal. Or I’m wrong. What do I know? But I think I’m right. Either way I’ve got to get back to the office. Come in Monday morning, we’ll get you set up with a first case, maybe some space to work. Looking forward to working with you again, okay?” He boxed Arturo’s ear like an older brother might roughhouse.

Arturo was caught off-guard by the abrupt end. “One more thing,” Arturo said.

“Who are you? Columbo?” Augie turned to the empty seat next to him. “He’s got one more thing.”

“Catarina wants to keep this quiet until we decide our next move.”

“You’re appearing in court, though? I gotta know that, because it’ll limit the work that I can give you if you can’t. I can find paper work, but that’s not coming through the door much these days. So, you’ll need more patience. Insurance companies give us the messy cases their in-house can’t handle, and that usually needs stand-up attorneys, not desk guys.”

“I can appear in court,” Arturo said, not knowing if Catarina would agree.

“You told the Bar Association?”

“This week, I’m going to tell them.”

Augie’s expression went from concern to antsy irritation. “So what does ‘keeping it quiet’ mean then?”

“The East River is pretty wide right? That’s what we’re counting on. Not that word won’t spread forever, but that we’ll have figured a decent living situation when the news that she’s got two husbands gets to her boss, who’s a strict Catholic apparently.”

“I don’t know what the fuck that means for me. Can I tell people you’re working for me again, or can I not tell people? Just a straight answer.”

“Tell who you need to tell, but preferably not people in Manhattan addresses, or who might have lunch with a DA, okay?”

“What the fuck, okay. I won’t mention anything next time I’m at Tavern on the Green playing bridge with Stewy.” He shook his head. “Fucking Columbo over here. ‘One more thing.’ Have a good day, I’m going before there’s another thing. Happy to have you back.”

\* \* \*

Breaking into Augie's advance, Arturo collected a feast. He stocked her fridge with Caputo's Italian mozzarella and olives, and Sahadi's nuts, dates and figs. They could close the meal with Sambuca and Italian pastries from Court Street Bakery, where the counter lady always shook powdered sugar on the pastries before closing the box.

Finished, Arturo pictured his counterpart working his old job as Arturo waited for Catarina on a bed. She was late—it must be eight p.m. already—late enough that the delay might mean Leo was joining them. Arturo hadn't been alone with Catarina for more than a few minutes since the duplication, and he could see Leo trying to prevent that.

When she finally arrived, she greeted him warmly. Not intending to, he kissed her into the doorframe until they crouched together on the floor, still kissing, her tasting faintly of whiskey. She managed to say, "No, I . . . okay but we can just kiss, only kiss."

He whispered that she was impossibly beautiful and that he would have died of longing if she'd arrived a few minutes later. Something in the nostalgia of hearing this old phrase slackened all the tension in her muscles, and she apologized for her crimes: making him wait tonight, shaving him, moving out, working too hard. They rolled into the apartment and kicked the door shut.

After, they lingered in the new bed. "How are you doing?"

"I'm fine."

"Just fine?"

He looked at her, his face asking if she really wanted to get into it. "Well, my wife is living in a college kid's apartment while I'm stuck with a guy with the same sad sack face as me." His voice was jokey, not revealing much. Then he added, "You said something before that wasn't quite accurate: that Leo and I want the three of us to stay together. Actually, we both want to have you to ourselves, like things were, but haven't said it because where does that get us? Call it a 50% chance, assuming you don't ditch us both. Better half of your attention than none of it. It's like a cloud

looming. I feel like I need to be ‘on’ all the time in order to be that one, waiting for you to make a call because we don’t know how to.”

“Thank you for sharing. I appreciate that.”

“I didn’t tell him I was going to tell you.”

“What if I love you too much to let one of you go?”

“Then we’re back to polyamory. Until you decide you need space and, I don’t know, skip town with the circus.”

His answers were worrisome. Being ‘on’ meant Leonard would feel drained and want to withdraw whenever he eventually had the chance. *Arturo*, she corrected in her own thoughts. *This one is Arturo, not Leo*. He *was* competition with himself. As absurd as the situation was, he was battling against himself for her attention, and each was keeping her away from the other. She had an overwhelming desire to give him a less intense evening.

“You want to smoke some pot?” she asked, she stood and walked to a green ceramic Buddha above a faux fireplace.

“Who are you? Are *you* the evil duplicate? My Catarina doesn’t smoke pot.”

Catarina smiled. “Neither do you, but Daisy’s nephew did. He left me a note saying it’s all mine now. I can finally find out what the hubbub in the sixties was about.”

He nodded and she brought over the Buddha full of weed and a pipe. “If this doesn’t work, we can call Dean and get pointers. It’s been a minute for me too.”

He lit it as she tried to inhale and it didn’t work well. “You’re meant to hold your finger over the carb when you inhale. Have you really never tried smoking weed?”

“Only rolled joints.” He placed her thumb over a small hole on the side of the pipe, and kept his hand firmly over hers as she tried again. The smoke flowed much better, and a light tingling

wave hit the back of her brain. She felt permission to be giddy. “Oh. Oh. It worked. Now it worked.” She squeezed her eyes shut and passed the pipe. “You.”

He took a long hit, and she could tell by the way his head jerked back that it worked. After her second hit, she had a brief coughing fit then laid on her back.

“Did you only become a lawyer for me?” she asked.

He looked at her, then away before responding. “No. I was ambitious before we met; you only gave that ambition direction. Other than Augie, I’d never met a lawyer before Maddie became one. Then the two smartest people I knew were doing this cool thing, and so it made sense. If we’d never gotten together, I’d have been an ambitious something else.”

“What did your parents want you to be?”

“They didn’t push expectations. I know neither of them wanted me to follow them into manual labor, but Alessandro in his heart-of-hearts would have loved me to be a Wobbly labor activist; a Joe Hill organizing, singing union songs.”

“You didn’t want that?”

“Nah.” He ashed the joint over the side of the bed. “Those union guys lived a hard life; a vow of poverty for the cause. I’m too terrified of being poor to take on that kind of risk. I don’t even know how Dean does what he does, almost thirty, still living in a squat, working in a bike shop. My parents used to stress constantly about money, fight about what to spend. But it’s more than that. What if someone you love gets hurt and you can’t pay the doctor? I resent Dean sometimes because he knows I’ll bail him out if life comes to that, but he hasn’t prepared, and my parents haven’t prepared. So, I’m the adult in the room by default. Perhaps, though, that’s just my cowardice dressed up as nobility.”

She didn’t say anything, only squinting at the ceiling.

“I mean I wouldn’t want to be rich-rich either,” he added when she was silent. “Just secure.”

“I wouldn’t mind being rich-rich,” she said.

“Really?”

“I wouldn’t give up who I was to get there. Obviously, it wasn’t worth staying in an unhappy marriage with Duncan; but being wealthy does solve a lot of problems.”

“Huh,” he said. She was surprised about his surprise. “Wish you’d told me sooner.”

Moved by his openness and loosened by the weed, Catarina told him about a secret from during their honeymoon: the thrill of spending her own money. She surprised him with steel collar-stays; an ugly upward curl had developed on his older dress shirts. Using the new collar-stays, he looked handsomer; they smoothed out something that gave away his class. She’d made clear they were bought with her own, untainted money. She’d longed to be financial equals with Duncan, hinting often how her second income after graduation would allow him to take an easier job requiring less travel. Duncan made many gestures towards ‘what is mine is ours’: They’d shared bank accounts and property titles, but as the marriage failed, this blending created a sense that all their shared money was dirty, all his. By contrast, the honeymoon funds were traceable to her salary; though he paid for law school too and even her salary itself had his fingerprints. She’d kept her pleasure in paying for the honeymoon secret partly because of Leonard’s touchiness around money and partly because the joy felt pitiable.

“You gave Duncan more than he gave you,” Arturo said. “He had limitless money; You gave him your only heart.”

This offer of comfort didn’t feel right either. “I took Duncan for granted; I gave him very little,” she said.

“You were young.” Then he laughed to himself.

“What?” she asked.

“Your mother would be broken-hearted to hear you took pleasure in running off with a pauper.”

Catarina laughed, then wondered if she was doing something wrong sharing secrets and plans with just Arturo, not Leo—the bonding thrill of partnership in crime.

“I guess we both disappointed our families in a way,” she said. “I should also have a couple kids by now, and a husband who never had thoughts like yours because money was assumed. What would you do if you weren’t afraid? Bike sales?”

He smiled her favorite smile. “I don’t know, bike sales is just a placeholder. We should both use this chance to try out something different—truly different. For now, I saw Augie before I came here. He said I could pick up some cases.”

She edged away from him, putting distance between them on the bed, then put her chin on her hand and looked him intently in the eyes. “You didn’t tell me you were going to do that.”

“We need money.”

A silence followed as Catarina considered the ramifications. “Tell me next time.”

“I also told Alice.”

“You spoke to Alice?”

“I gave her the sculpture a few days back, for her show.”

“I forgot about that. People liked the hands sculpture?”

“Nobody smashed it in disgust, but no one offered to buy it.”

“So, you made time for Alice. You know my father warned me,” she said, attempting a playful voice, “never trust a man who prefers the company of women. He said they’ll inevitably show themselves to be a poof or a weak man, unable to hold up around his own gender, and he’ll sleep with his friends’ wives.”

“A poof? Really? Was your dad British in this memory?”

“No, silly. He was speaking Spanish. But isn’t ‘poof’ lovely. Poof! Like a puff of air. Or a pastry.” She took another hit and she smiled, and without warning he pulled her in by the small of the back, so her pelvis squeezed close to his hip. Even smiling, worry lines around her eyes gave her a wounded look that evoked his desire. When he spotted it, he’d interrupt the moment to pull her close; to kiss her, to slip his fingers inside her. Her fragility evoked an erotic want to comfort her. In response, she went for his neck with a half bite/half kiss.

“When did you even hear that word?” he asked, continuing the conversation casually.

“I watched Monty Python yesterday. Unlike you, I can’t sit up and brood all night, every night,” she teased.

“About the female friends, I’ve gravitated that way since Maddie in high school. With men I always feel stuck in a pissing match. Everything from how you make money to who you fuck. It’s just exhausting to feel like you’re in constant competition. If you say something a little inaccurate, they make a dig just to show they know a little more.”

She rolled over and met his eyes. “You’ve won your share of pissing matches, Mr. *Summa Cum Laude*.”

“I was only competing in the intramural league. If you and Maddie were in my school, the story would have been different.” He rubbed her palm with his thumb. “But I know I’m smart, sure, the issue is more like when two men are greeting each other and feel this need to give each other painful handshakes—what is that?” O’Donnell had done this Catarina’s first day, perhaps to make her feel included, and afterward she’d avoided his handshakes. “They want to measure themselves against each other every which way: who can spit furthest, who is driving what car?”

“You’re not like that, so all men aren’t.”

“Part of me is, and I don’t like when other men bring it out.”

“Will living with Leo bringing it out? Competitiveness that you don’t like?”

He pressed a thumb deeply into the back of his other hand as if he wanted to rub it away. “We’ll see. We are literally in competition to keep you so, yeah, I’m trying to push myself to find an edge as the Leonard who lost the job. Even these words right now are my best effort to still be your husband when the dust settles.”

“Huh,” she said, concerned, and then indignant at being made a prize akin to a schoolboy pissing match. She willed a flirtatious smile to her lips, and switched gears. “So, tell me, who do we want as a beard?”

“A what?”

“Another woman like Joyce suggested.”

The question felt like a trap. “Nobody,” he said.

“Oh, come on—a game without consequences, play with me. Who would it be if it were someone? A friend of mine? One of those women you lunch with? A stranger?” Saying risky things created a rush in her. She also felt relief being with just one of him, this making him more *him*. Yet, the other one being out there somewhere created an echo of the clandestine. “Look at me as you answer.”

He did. “I don’t know. I love you.”

“I know. It’s a game.” She pressed herself to him and linked their arms at the elbow. “We won’t do it. I’m just so curious.”

They threw out options, mentioning Joyce (open-minded but too much like a sister); Dani from the bike shop (a lesbian, unbeknownst to Catarina). He laughed at this, relaxing into it. Catarina kissed his arm. “What about Alice? Oh, look at you. Alice is who you’d choose if there were no consequences.”

“There’s always consequences.”

“But if there were none.”

“Fine, yes, I’d sleep with Alice if there were no consequences.”

She squealed and pushed at him in mock disapproval, then rolled away as though he’d revealed something terrible. Something about letting him make her jealous felt fair. “Typical.”

“You’re jealous?”

“She shows off how she knows every style of dance—including Mexican styles that I don’t know. And that body. You two can go to five-hour *avant-garde* operas full of space ships and dancers chanting random numbers.” The year before, Alice’s friend had gotten them free tickets to *Einstein on the Beach*. Alice had brought a handsome too-thin fashion photographer as her date. Catarina found the performance unique and hypnotic but also overlong and, at times, boring. To her shock, Leonard and Alice *loved* the play—talking ecstatically about how the performance created transcendence through the mundane and absurd. Alice eventually named a kitten Mr. Bojangles after a line. Catarina loved watching Leonard so excited, and retroactively upgraded her appreciation. Still, while leaving the theater Catarina and Alice’s date shared a ‘do you get this either?’ moment about how effusive their dates acted.

Arturo’s discomfort discussing Alice delighted Catarina. She was both playacting as jealous as a flirtation, and also truly jealous.

“I knew this was a trap. I wouldn’t marry her. She doesn’t have what you have.”

“Because she’s not emotionally damaged?” He’d once confessed that he was afraid he only fell in love with woman who were broken in some way. He could heal them, and feel useful and secure. At the time, her first marriage had left her so damaged that this felt reassuring. Now his trait created the opposite effect. Would he be drawn to a new project as she became less broken?

“Because I don’t love her. I love you.”

He was too much, too sweet. She felt warm. He was back, her true husband. Her mock jealous affect broke into a smile, and she took another hit, interested in the salty, numb tingling on her lips. She caught him watching her tongue move carefully, lustfully but also lovingly.

“I love your lips,” he said.

“Thank you,” she said. She glanced down his body. “Your cock gives me a lot of happiness. Just the right size to really fill me up.”

After they made love a second time, Catarina got chatty and told a story he’d heard from her years ago, but from a different angle. The story was of when Catarina was invited for the first time to Sarah Russo’s birthday sleepover. The Russo sleepovers were legendary. In prior years, Catarina had to leave around 10pm because she was too young, but after ten was when fun things began. That evening had started off promising. Catarina tasted a Fluffernutter for the first time while the girls all listened to *Heartbreak Hotel* on repeat on Sarah’s expensive-looking record player.

When the night grew late, nine of the eleven other girls—all except for Mae Durden and Terry Gonzalez—teased Catarina for being chubby. It got so bad that Catarina tried to call home, but Sarah hung up the phone by pressing down on the receiver as Catarina called. When Catarina called again from another room, her father Pedro yelled at her for prank calling before he heard that Catarina was crying too fitfully to put together sentences. Pedro came to save her, but the front door was locked even from the inside—so Catarina had to wake Mrs. Russo. Even just woken and irritated, she looked polished next to Pedro in his weathered leather jacket. Catarina slept between her parents that night. Her father held her tightly.

Catarina recalled this story now, in her temporary apartment, to Arturo to share just how deep her roots of confusion and insecurity with her body went. Arturo massaged her feet and didn’t interrupt as she went on. She went on to describe being overweight until she took up exercise and used laxatives in college, and how this complicated her feelings when her first husband slowly lost all

physical interest in her. Cumulatively, everything messed with her in confusing ways she still didn't fully grasp.

When she was done, she concluded by saying. "Just now, I felt a little like I was cheating on my husband."

Her statement felt both true and false to Arturo. He didn't like being placed on the outside of the marriage again, but something was transgressive and forbidden. The lovemaking had had a fresh, unexpected rawness. He didn't want the weight of transgression, but rather something firm and immutable. She wiggled her foot to indicate he was kneading her foot too hard, and he relaxed his thumbs.

"He'll understand," Arturo said, finally, though he couldn't predict Leo's reaction. They had no set rule against one-on-ones, but he wouldn't want her with Leo.

She didn't respond and fell into an inscrutable mood. He sensed she wanted him gone, but Arturo wasn't clear why.

The commute back was brutal. The train took forever to arrive and when it did the car was crowded with mohawked CBGB-type punks and dock workers.

When he reached Spanish Harlem and told his counterpart what happened, Leo punched him in the eye, then tended to him almost paternally.

He understood, of course. He would have done the same thing.

\* \* \*

After Arturo left, emptiness flooded in.

She wasn't avoiding her decision or ignoring the choices. She both wanted and didn't want all the obvious paths: both, one, neither. She wanted contradictions: dreams of a future with them both but without the social consequences. She'd had dual, unfair impulses throughout his visit—she

wanted space from him and she wanted reassurance from both Arturo and Leo that they loved her as much as ever.

She took off her cross and placed it on a stranger's bedside table and looked at the metal chain bundled there. It looked lifeless, false. Often her lapses were allowances connected to Leonard. As though their bond itself existed outside of morality or religion—to preserve their connection, anything was allowed. Except that the outside world was not so convinced that love excused everything, even passionate love. A little comfort came from knowing that every moral compromise she made, he made too.

## Chapter Eight

The next day, Wednesday August 3, was Lucas's indictment and arraignment. During the day the Fuerzas Armadas De Liberacion Nacional Puertoriquena—a group calling for Puerto Rico's independence—set off two handbag-sized bombs in the US Defense Department security offices in midtown and another that blew out storefront windows near Grand Central. The bombers put out calls to buildings all over the city saying they were next. Catarina had to leave the courthouse with the flood of bodies—every abandoned briefcase a potential security threat. Outside, rain poured and the crowd was so thick under the awning she walk-ran in heels to DA's office around the corner subway, keep the case files she'd taken dry under her dress shirt.

When got the all-clear hours later they returned inside, the arraignment was a spectacle. Lucas's mother brought her entire church to co-sign his bail, a show of numbers to impress the judge of the civic trust in the boy, and the press. Perhaps they'd gotten wind the prosecutor was a Catholic Latina woman from the barrio.

Another contingent was present that shouted that South Americans were all terrorists and chanted "kick them out." The judge called for order and called for them to be removed, but the police and court security were so taxed by the bomb threat that in the end the group was let to disrupt until they ran out of energy. Shapiro claimed he'd had nothing to do with the church or press appearing, which strained credulity, although the press presence would now surely backfire.

Lucas was released on bail.

When Catarina arrived at the Brooklyn apartment after work, her makeup a mess, wet from rain and experience a shivery chill, a letter awaited her that was typewritten on letterhead stationery nicked from Capra & Cipriani LLP stock. It was signed by both her husbands with their identically illegible signatures. It read only: *The nights are cold here, and we are bored of each other. We beg of you: move back in.*

She sat at the edge of her bed, placed the letter on the sheets and smoothed it. She called before she could decide not to call.

Chairs squeaked on the other end of the line. Their voices echoed a little. She pictured them in the apartment sitting around the receiver. What were they doing just before her call?

“I’m thinking of going to see my mother this weekend. I feel bad for ignoring her calls.” She braced for him to say travel was an extravagant expense right now.

Silence.

“Say something,” she said.

“This is Leo. Listen, when Arturo came home, I punched him. So, when you see him, he’ll have a bruise and cut along his cheek.”

Catarina sucked in. This was frighteningly out-of-character. “I’ll come Friday, and stay over. We’ll do something light Saturday. Dancing or a movie.”

The line was full of static. “This is Arturo. No, we’re fine here. Looking forward to seeing you.”

\* \* \*

When she arrived in Spanish Harlem on Friday, the apartment was somehow already messier than it had been in years. Leonard was like this, and his whole family too. At first, Catarina told herself she didn’t mind. But two years into living together, she couldn’t find something, and flipped out. He’d reacted with genuine surprise. When she calmed, he agreed not to leave things everywhere in a space that small, and he’d kept his word until the split.

On the dining table was a chessboard and a dated schoolbook with words and sentence fragments in response to prompts they’d standardized, each page was for a single date, starting with Monday July 17. Joyce would be pleased—they were continuing to retest themselves to spot divergences. The similarities in responses were dissolving, though the chess ability remained steady.

She was drawn away from the book by the familiar sound of the bathroom sink. Leo was changing a bandage on Arturo's cheek in the bathroom.

"Did you boys get that out of your system?" Catarina asked.

"I was dumb," Leo said.

"Both of us were," Arturo said. He flinched when she tried to touch it.

When they joined her around the kitchen table, she dropped copies of several local papers and said, "You're not going to do anything like this, are you?"

The front-page headline blared "DOUBLE MURDER" with an image of two doubles attached at the hip strangling each other. They had exaggerated Latin features, plus long, unruly hair, and thick moustaches and goatees. The image looked more like Carlos Santana than the defendant. The *Daily News* went with bold text that read simply "FREAK INDICTED FOR KILLING SELF."

"You're famous, or your defendant is," Arturo said, squinting.

She nodded.

"Well, at least there's no sombreros," Leo said, looking over his duplicate's shoulder at the *Daily News*.

"What's inside is worse. They found a nut who claims that when you split, your good and evil sides split too, and so the one that committed the killing was an abomination of some kind. Even *The Times* got the judge's name wrong and says that I gave Lucas bail when the judge does that. Being in the center of a news cycle shakes my confidence in everything else I've ever read, the way they authoritatively misstate basic facts." She sat across them, and lowered her tone. "You didn't have an urge to be violent right after you split, did you?" she asked. "With the hunger, the disorientation. I'm only asking for the case."

They glanced at each other, using their secret language. “We were aware our lives had changed forever,” Leo said quietly, stroking his mustache. “Some things aren’t divisible. We were afraid of what you’d do.”

“If we did something violent, we wouldn’t be the person we are.”

She stored the information for her theory of the prosecution. Perhaps the defendant had a girlfriend or other indivisible relationships, positions or possessions.

She kissed them, feeling relief that something had been confirmed. Touching Arturo’s hand, she felt the absence of his wedding ring, squeezed where it wasn’t, and turned to Leo. The ring was in the normal place on his hand. Did they alternate days? Some system must be in place.

She remained for the weekend, but returned to Brooklyn on Sunday.

\* \* \*

Arturo’s evening alone with Catarina had reassured Arturo; the weekend felt like a breakthrough towards the marriage stabilizing. However, the following weeks undid this sense.

His re-adjustment to the rhythm of Augie’s personal injury firm took him away from her. While technically not re-hired, he was given space he could work out of: the windowless room he’d used during law school rather than the vacant space of the laid-off attorney. In fact, while Augie had reassigned the urgent matters, the vacant office remained full of case files, random notes and junk. Arturo’s first assignment was to go through all the old paper and make recommendations: either shred, file away or schedule reminders. Arturo found multiple neglected open cases that had languished for years.

By Arturo’s second day, it became clear that while Augie’s bottom-line was being hit by stagflation yet the firm needed bodies to cover neglected work. Arturo had to cover a lead paint defense hearing in the Bronx for a pre-trial motion, representing a landlord without having yet secured a new law license. Thus, he was again Leonard Galletti for a day, a name comforting to use

again but that already felt a little alien. On the subway, he needed to study the implications of the city, state, and soon to be enacted federal lead paint laws and landlord obligations using only the absent associate's briefing.

At the same time, he stepped into the bureaucratic morass of disentangling their identities, including trading off lengthy phone calls with the IRS, the Social Security office and various other agencies. While Leo tried to help, Arturo handled the bulk of issues since he started the process while unemployed and faced an immediate need for new documentation to work.

Meanwhile, Leo helped Catarina write her brief for her upcoming Court of Appeals. The legal issue was whether murder was an appropriate charge when—as the defense framed it—the murderer was the victim. Throughout their marriage, Leonard and Catarina often shared case strategy and practiced oral arguments in important matters. This was a violation of attorney confidentiality ethics, but one they saw as harmless. The decision for Leo to help with the Court of Appeals work wasn't linked directly Arturo's to evening in Brooklyn—Arturo suddenly was busy, and Leo jumped right in—but Leo supporting Catarina on the assignment also felt like a rough balancing. An odd tradeoff, because Arturo had a night of fresh emotional and physical intimacy while Leo had something longer, more stable. After several weeks of this, Arturo felt something new around her: in the way. Catarina became so enmeshed in the burst of brief writing and argument preparation that little else was left of her time.

All three of them studiously avoided the topic of what they were doing with their marriage.

\* \* \*

On August 11, the morning Catarina was scheduled to pick jurors in the Lucas case, she exited the subway to a mob outside the courthouse, the corner. Several barricades had been knocked over and the crowd had spilled over into endless steps leading to the courthouse entrance and into the streets, stopping traffic

As she squeezed around the crowd's edge to make her way into the courthouse, crowd members held up an electric chair and chanted "Let him fry!" right by her ear. A paranoia took hold that these people were about Lucas, but a handmade "Death for Son of Sam, and His Dog" sign clarified that the crowd's current bloodlust was directed towards the serial killer. The scene constituted a nightmarish negative image of a Beatles concert, with angry middle-aged men screaming in place of young women. She was tossed around as she made her way up the steps, where the crowd seemed unsteady even as it tried to push past the new police barricade at the top of the steps, just in front of the entrance where the police were trying to protect the building itself and restore the flow of traffic into the building. A heavy push from boney hips caused her to lose her balance and she would have fallen if she hadn't knocked into another body below her. Someone gripped her upper arm tightly steadying her and tugging her forward. A security guard she knew, he escorted her to the other side of the barricade—roughly pushing aside angry bodies.

Inside she quickly learned that the Son of Sam murderer had been caught and would be indicted that very morning. The whole DA's office was alive with the news.

O'Donnell hastily got his section together to celebrate at lunch with a dog-shaped cake, referencing the neighbor's pet who Berkowitz claimed demanded the blood of attractive women. This continued a gallows humor tradition of celebratory cakes shaped to reference high profile events. O'Donnell gave his standard stilted talk recounting his pride in the work of the assigned prosecutors who did a fine job this morning, would be under a lot of strain in the coming months. As with every lunchtime speech, he closed by emphasizing that they were a family here in his section, then he jabbed the knife in the cake—red velvet per tradition. It evoked casual animal cruelty.

As the awkward milling commenced, O'Donnell pulled Catarina aside. He hadn't forgotten the Lucas jury selection in the afternoon. In front of Maddie and while enthusiastically eating a dog's

leg, he recommended Catarina pick the guys reading the *Post* or the *Daily News*; people reading the *Times* or the *Journal* asked too many questions. It wasn't about politics in the slightest, he noted. "I like people who like simple stories. With a murder like this you want to tell a simple story: kid killed someone; kid goes to jail. Let the defense try to make their heads spin with what was going in his head. When they're done, just throw a little confusion into their theory, then tell them the simple story again. That gives them something to hang their hat on when the defense's argument is too exhausting."

He paused and looked at her expectantly. She nodded.

"Also," he continued, "show up a little early and just poke your head in the room the potential jurors are waiting in for a second. You're not supposed to do that—pisses the judge off if you're with jurors alone, but even if you just peek your head in the room a second so the jury pool sees you and then go back into the hall and speak to the defense attorney a minute about pleas or whatever, then the jury thinks they're waiting for the other attorney to show up, and he's the one wasting their time."

O'Donnell had given identical advice before all the other times Catarina had selected a jury. He repeated himself without realizing, and didn't like being reminded of his habit.

"I'd like to offer a better plea," Catarina said. "At the interrogation, the defense attorney acted hungry to close. I was a little surprised they didn't bite already."

"What's the new offer?"

"Six years, probation after four, second degree manslaughter."

O'Donnell coughed. "Are you kidding me? He kills somebody and buries him in a basement, confession and evidence and you want him on the street in six years? What did Shapiro sell you on?"

"Shapiro didn't sell anything," she said. "Kid is young, remorseful, no priors, turned himself in, heat of passion, first offense. Six years is a long time. He'll miss college."

“You think Lucas would have gone to college?” he asked skeptically.

“Probably. Educated parents, decent grades. I can get a conviction for manslaughter two definitely, manslaughter one if we draw a bloodthirsty jury. But I don’t know that we should get that much. You want the city to pay for this kid to sit in a cell for most of his life?”

O’Donnell rolled his jaw. “I’ll run it up to Stewy. The ‘not worth the resources’ should be enough. We’ve got enough attention on us with Sam running around. If you don’t hear from me by this afternoon, make the offer. Six and four.” He leaned back. “Listen, we can do this because of Berkowitz getting caught takes the press attention off your case a while, but if Shapiro rejects this offer that’s game. The media glare is going to come back on your moves, including some respectable papers, but the mooks at *Daily News* and *Post* will still be the biggest pricks in your ass. You ready for the glare of trial? You got a theory of the case?”

“Sure. The kid was in extreme distress, so a murder charge won’t stick. The key questions are whether he was acting in self-defense and, if not, did he intend to kill the duplicate or was it an accident.” If Shapiro won on self-defense, that meant the kid went free, while reckless manslaughter sentences meant Lucas would go away for up to 15 years. Intentional manslaughter could mean life in jail. “So Shapiro is going to argue that Lucas reasonably feared for his life. Possibly come at it by claiming that Lucas thought the duplicate was an evil spirit. He panics.” Catarina’s enthusiasm ramped up. “But if you see this kid, that doesn’t really jibe. He’s prickly in a teenage way, but pretty well-spoken, good grades. Like I just said, he comes from a professional family. Nobody’s going to buy that he thought he was seeing a demon, or taking PCP like some of the papers suggested.

“So mostly, I’m going to keep bringing it back to what physically happened: a young adult bludgeoned another one with a blunt object. That doesn’t happen without intent. Right after the split, they’re having the same thoughts. If both react defensively, nobody is attacked. What actually happened is they simultaneously escalated. Our defendant just happened to be closer to a weapon.”

“That’s good. Keeps it simple. Something else to slip in that mix, one word: machismo. He killed the other boy because of machismo. An instinct to react to situations with hot-headed aggression. It’ll sound especially compelling from someone from the same background.”

She jerked back. “I don’t know about that idea,” she said forcefully, then moderated her tone as she continued. “He’s from a country where night-time invasions happen regularly, so I don’t think we want to make this cultural.”

He looked surprised by her body language and pushback, then they both laughed. Underneath the laughter she felt uncomfortable.

“Let me know what Shapiro says, maybe this all goes away without a trial,” he said, in a way told her she was being dismissed with no bad blood.

\* \* \*

The jury selection took forever. The defendant wasn’t present.

Their judge would call in about two dozen prospective jurors from the holding pen where O’Donnell advised her to peek in—then the judge, the defense and the prosecutor each got to question the jurors for conflicts, and the lawyers were given the option to either strike the jurors for cause or use a limited number of peremptory challenges that allowed each side to exclude jurors without giving reasons. The courtroom’s air conditioning was busted and everybody was coming up with excuses to get out of the jury duty. Shapiro used four of his challenges on three straight young Chinese men.

During a break, when Catarina and Shapiro were alone, she said “Going hard on the Asians today, aren’t you?”

“Jesus, you really are O’Donnell’s spawn, aren’t you?” Shapiro said. “I live and work in Chinatown—I represent them all the time. You think I’m going to discriminate?”

“Actions speak loud.”

“You guys are so hypocritical.”

She knew exactly what hypocrisy Shapiro was referencing. Catarina was emulating O'Donnell. Whenever defense attorneys used their peremptory challenges on jurors from Chinatown, O'Donnell would make a faux quip like, “smart move, he knows Orientals tend to be pro-prosecution,” gleefully accusing defense attorneys of using peremptory challenges based on racial or ethnic stereotypes. Of course, the prosecutors also did this constantly and sometimes openly—in many prosecutors' eyes, ethnic groups were assumed to be biased towards “their own” and some groups like liberal Jews were seen as universally soft on defendants. But for O'Donnell, suggesting the do-gooder defense attorneys profiled Asians was still effective because they often saw themselves as above racial profiling, and didn't like being confronted with evidence that they practiced the same dark arts.

Catarina avoided using racial profiling herself, though doing so was perfectly legal, because found the practice both morally noxious and lazy, and instead trusted her intuition to spot favorable jurors. She did, however, adopt O'Donnell's tactic of ribbing defense attorneys when she caught them profiling.

“You didn't see me striking all the Latinos today, did you?” Catarina asked Shapiro.

“Oh please,” Shapiro dismissed this, “don't pretend you didn't strike the only Jew accidentally.”

“Now that,” she said, “offends me.”

“You accused first.”

“You struck three Asians in a row.”

“I'll tell you why, if you want to know.”

She crossed her arms, and looked him up and down. “I'll bite. Tell me.”

“I saw them all trying to shirk jury duty by pretending they couldn’t speak English. The judge made that joke, and they laughed, and the judge said to those three ‘come on, man, you can’t be laughing at my jokes and tell me you don’t speak English.’ And you could see they got all sullen that they weren’t getting out of jury service.”

“Okay?” She nodded skeptically.

“In my experience I don’t want jurors who don’t want to be there, especially when they’re not going to take it seriously. I’m afraid they’ll just pick the lawyer they want to screw over, or put the bare minimum into understanding the facts, and go along with whatever verdict the majority wants.”

“Half the people in that courtroom today didn’t want to be there.”

“And I don’t blame them—they have to miss work or childcare, and are paid pennies for their service. But I don’t know which half wants out, or I’d use my challenges on them too if I had enough. I’m not saying I’m an angel. Maybe if I had really bad facts, I’d try to load up with indifferent jurors and roll the dice. Hasn’t happened yet.”

She nodded. “Sorry to imply you profiled.”

“Same.” She put documents from her accordion binder and slide some to him. “A new plea on the table.”

“I’ll run it by Lucas,” Shapiro said somewhat brusquely, barely looking at the terms Catarina had fought hard for. “He’s going to reject it.”

“Let me know,” she said, coldly, wondering why she’d tried.

“I shouldn’t say this,” Shapiro said, “but so you know I wasn’t asking for a plea flippantly—I’m frustrated too. Lucas is being stubborn about pleas without really articulating why. Maybe he’s refusing the pleas because he’s blinded by feelings of guilt, or more interested in receiving justice than a better deal.”

“Justice? That’s a strange hill to choose to die on,” Catarina said, echoing more words of O’Donnell.

For the first time, Shapiro laughed. “Yeah, I don’t get it either. I’ll let you know what he says. Oftentimes I find folks come around closer to trial though, when the prospect of prison time becomes real. So if you can keep this offer on the table for as long as long as you can. I know you guys have strict rules on that sometimes.”

“I’ll do what I can,” she said.

\* \* \*

When Catarina arrived at work the next day, Daisy peeked in with another stack of yellow missed call slips.

“Started before I got here, and it’s not stopping,” Daisy said. “Maddie’s been taking some of them for you.”

The calls all started with same script: “If I stole an apple from a store, I wouldn’t get bail, and he killed a man in a basement and you let him out. If he runs away and kills again, that’s blood on your hands.” She let them say their piece until they wore themselves out. If they grew nasty, she hung up but most ran out of things to say quickly.

Daisy found the source: a tabloid journalist had published a conspiratorial piece in a paper called *The Sheephead Trumpet* suggesting the Manhattan D.A.’s Office had only let Lucas out on bail because the prosecutor and defendant were both Hispanic. The reporter identified her as “Catarina Flores,” her maiden name, and published her work number.

When Catarina told Arturo about this over a lunchtime call, he said, “That’s ridiculous. Of course they’d get bail if they stole an apple. The standard for getting out on bail is whether someone is a flight risk or a danger to others. First-time apple thieves are neither.”

During the afternoon, another call came in with a version of the bail scenario in which Reggie Jackson was kidnapped and made to hit line drives with stolen apples in a parking lot in Yonkers. The voice was familiar, and finally she placed it as Arturo's falsetto, she let the story go on until a laugh escaped her lips and then she couldn't stop laughing. Maddie gave her an inquisitive look. Catarina mouthed 'Leonard'. Maddie gave a thumbs up, and mouthed *I thought you'd finally snapped.*

Amidst this, O'Donnell entered with a glower. Seeing her mood, his eyes narrowed as if she were a chatty secretary.

"I've got to go. I'll call you back," she said, and unhooked the phone. "We're getting harassing calls. Leonard was concerned."

O'Donnell lifted his hand. "Bigger things. Interlocutory appeal directly to the Court of Appeals." This meant that before going to trial, they would have to first litigate a pre-trial issue in front of New York State's highest court.

"What? Can you do that? We were about to have trial. We have a jury impaneled."

"They did it. Judge will have to set a new timeline after the appeal is decided. Sorry, kid. That's the breaks."

## Chapter Nine

Lucas's interlocutory appeal was put on an accelerated schedule. Catarina only had been given a week to submit a response brief, and Shapiro a week to reply. The Court of Appeals scheduled oral arguments for September 1. During the whole period she largely kept away from her husbands, though they were rarely far from her mind.

Catarina had never appeared before the Court of Appeals, New York State's highest court. The courthouse itself was only a few blocks from the Manhattan Supreme Court, the misleading name of trial-level state court where she argued most of her cases. In those few blocks, the neighborhood shifted from Chinatown shops and Little Italy restaurants to a generic downtown business district.

Catarina was given second chair to Neil Flannigan, a veteran of the Manhattan D.A.'s Appeals Division, meaning Catarina would be at the prosecutor's table but wouldn't be speaking. Shapiro was the lone defense attorney.

The courtroom was designed to be imposing, the seven judges of the court seated in robes at a long, ancient wooden table. This table towered over the speaker's podium and the two small litigant tables.

The room was clean but weathered by time. On either side of the gallery benches were oil paintings of all the former chief judges in robes sitting in front of shelves of books. Each was an old white man, creating a sense that any ambitions to sit on the bench would be foolhardy. On the other hand, newly-appointed Chief Justice Klein *was* a woman, a presence that told a story of new possibilities and stirred Catarina's ambitions.

"Who is representing the People?" Chief Judge Klein asked.

Flannigan stood and walked to the podium.

"You wrote a good brief," Judge Klein said sharply.

“Thank you, your honor,” Flannigan said, nodding eagerly. Judge Grasso, next to Klein, sighed like Flannigan hadn’t read the room.

“But you’re over the page limit. Take it back, make it shorter, resubmit by tomorrow.” Justice Klein tossed the clipped pages over the bench onto the floor in front of the podium. Catarina collected it, mortified. The brief was almost entirely her work product, completed in a rush. “It was well-written, nonetheless. Okay, let’s hear from the defense. Your appeal. You’ve got ten minutes.”

Flannigan left the podium to Shapiro, who gave Flannigan a sympathetic nod.

“Thank you. Your honors, the burden of proof for a murder case under the NY criminal code can’t be met here,” Shapiro said. “The code clearly requires a showing that ‘with the intent to cause the death of another person, he or she causes the death of such person.’ As a matter of law, the defendant in this case did not kill ‘another person’ as the only victim was him. There was no ‘other person.’”

“What I want to know,” Judge Klein said, “is why we’re here in the first place, right now. This Court has been clear there’s no right to appeal a criminal matter absent statutory authorization. What statute allows an interlocutory appeal from a criminal indictment?” These were nearly exact words from Catarina’s brief. A thrill went through her.

“Your honor, there’s no need to be formalistic here. I think we’d all agree that if the D.A.’s office indicted a defendant for, say, murder of his arm, or any other crime that didn’t exist, that the defendant wouldn’t have to suffer through a trial before coming to a conclusion.”

“I’m not sure—” Judge Klein said.

“Wait,” Judge Grasso cut in. Was Klein being talked over? But Klein didn’t seem bothered. Perhaps Grasso hadn’t heard her speak. He was the only Depression-era Judge still on the court and looked enough like a 19<sup>th</sup> century painting that his bulky, modern hearing aid seemed anachronistic.

“Your premise is that this is not another person. This second Lucas, I get that he has the same name, the same social security number and all of that, but that needs to shift at some point, right? When is that in your view? What if someone duplicated at age two, say? When could they be guilty of intending to murder a fellow person instead of an extension of themselves? When the paperwork is complete? The moment those brains have different thoughts? Are you asking the court to measure souls?”

“Your honor, I’ll leave the soul questions to priests and rabbis, but as a bright line no criminal murder can be committed until they are legally separate.” Listening, Catarina jotted a rebuttal note: *crimes against pregnant women vs fetuses*, but then crossed it out before Flannigan could see. This was the wrong angle for old guard liberals.

“You mean,” Judge Klein asked, “if the second Lucas had made his way to City Hall then he’s safe? Isn’t that a bit formalist? If an unregistered illegal immigrant is killed, that’s still murder of a person, isn’t it?” He was directly quoting from a section of Catarina’s brief beyond the technical page limit. A tingle crept into Catarina through the back of her neck and flowered in her mind. She believed she’d be doing better than Shapiro or Flannigan at the podium, but also felt an impostor-like fear that she could be escorted out of the courtroom at any moment.

“I’m not saying he isn’t a person,” Shapiro’s response began. “I’m saying he isn’t *another* person.” Judge Grasso leaned back, removed his bulky hearing aid, placed it meaningfully on the bench and became interested in paperwork. Catarina’s shoulders loosened, and she too only half-listened from then on. She would and *should* win this appeal, in her first high profile trial.

\* \* \*

Catarina left the Manhattan courthouse feeling like she belonged. She was doing what she was meant to do. In an auspicious coincidence, Bella Abzug was speaking in the courthouse plaza. The crowd was holding up union and feminist signs, along with the standard Abzug for Mayor

campaign gear. Abzug's thick Bronx inflection stimulated something in Catarina, even though she couldn't vote in the primary because she hadn't gotten around to registering as a Democrat.

She peeled away from Flannigan before he could suggest lunch. She wanted to find her husband and celebrate with him. She took the train the two stops across the river to the Brooklyn's Supreme Court—a misleadingly named trial court. Unlike the grandiosity of the Manhattan Supreme Courthouse where she worked, Brooklyn Supreme looked somewhere between a prison and a boarding school designed on the cheap.

There, she found Arturo in closing arguments for a personal injury case for Russo LLP.

The hand-written argument schedule in front of the courtroom indicated the defense attorney was from Winthrop Ashe, a Manhattan “white shoe” firm. Their young defense attorney was in the middle of summing up to the jury. He looked familiar to Catarina, perhaps from Columbia Law. His body language and delivery suggested he was slumming it by doing personal injury defense in Brooklyn.

“All I ask,” this guy said, “is that you decide the case on the facts. Don't take into account that I have this fancy suit and my colleague is . . .” He gestured vaguely at Arturo without turning. Behind him, Arturo opened the breast of his suit-jacket, looked down at the worn lining and straightened his tie with playful indignation. The jury laughed, and the defense attorney's smile said that he thought they were laughing at Arturo.

The Winthrop defense attorney had made a miscalculation, and Arturo had capitalized, Catarina thought proudly. Arturo had innate fashion instincts that he used tactically for work, but mostly didn't bother with in his personal life. If he'd wanted the jury to see a high-end lawyer, he'd have worn the three-piece suit his friend had tailored. But he wanted to be seen as relatable today.

After the case finished, they left Brooklyn Supreme together to celebrate.

“To the most powerful female judge in New York repeating my arguments,” Catarina toasted. She and Arturo sat at Queen Marie Italian on Court Street, their extravagant ritual for after significant trials. They clinked glasses.

“I liked your move today,” she said. “Straightening your tie like a doofus.”

“You caught that?” he said, proudly. “Lawyers like him always expect juries to be as impressed with them as they are with themselves. Maybe it works in Manhattan. That’s an advantage of people who grew up like us: we still have some awareness of how the rabble perceive wealth. Fucking white-shoe attorney offered to help get me an interview.”

“Before or after the verdict?”

“After.”

“Maybe he meant it. A job offer before the verdict means they think you’re a sucker who will pull your punches, but after the verdict, well then they really might want you.” She paused for effect. “You know, Winthrop Ashe’s first-year associates make six figures. I thought they didn’t even hire laterals. You should consider it.”

Arturo’s eyes lit up briefly, but then he shook his head. “He was probably making himself sound important.” She nodded slowly, translated what was beneath his words: he was excited and proud but didn’t want to seem excited or proud. He continued, “Tell me about your case today. Sounds like it went well?”

She lit up. “Have you been in that courtroom before? All those oil paintings, even the pews seemed extravagant and awe inspiring. I felt something really powerfu—”

“That’s what the Court of Appeals is designed to make you feel. That awe. It’s all the same silly playacting. Everyone is pretending and wearing costumes—the ‘all rise. Oye, oye, those seeking justice before this court come forth.’”

“I appreciate the ritual of it.”

“Catholicism makes everything seem less silly.”

Catarina frowned. “I thought you’d be pleased.”

Arturo leaned back and looked down the street a little too distantly. He frowned. “I am pleased, but it’s a complex thing to celebrate.”

“I offered him—”

He gestured her to lower her voice.

She looked around, then continued softly, “The best plea he could have hoped for in his situation. We got the body, the weapon, the confession.”

He didn’t respond and she doubted her moral compass. Lucas didn’t attend the appeal, which had made the consequences more abstract. But Arturo’s mood wasn’t about the case. She blinked and checked the time, remembering she needed to condense the brief within 24 hours.

Their waitress came and poured water. As she did, Catarina watched his mental wheels turning as he tapped his glasses against the table.

“With me taking freelance work, we’re quickly approaching open secret territory.”

“We aren’t hiding anything, just keeping our private life private. Lots of new relationships remain private early on. Same with pregnancy or health problems. People get that.”

“This is a terrible plan,” he said.

She bit her lower lip. “I know I’m not being fair, but I feel I have this radio dial where when I try to hear what my heart wants, really wants, I keep getting static-y noise and I recalibrate and then even when a decision surfaces they don’t always feel as solid the next day. I have no idea how you are always so certain of your moves. You just decide you’re going to love me and live with the consequences.”

Arturo made a fist. “We don’t hear anything for a week, and then you invite me to lunch to talk about a career milestone. Sometimes you seem so passive, and we’re left to guess what you

want, or what you want us to do. I don't know if me taking temp assignments is a relief because we'll have more money coming in or if you're sore more people might learn I've duplicated. I can't tell if you're working through your thoughts or if you're not thinking of us at all."

"I'm always thinking of us. This week has been a runaway train—you knew that." She met his accusing glare. "What you call being passive, I call temporizing. We shouldn't act lightly. Aren't you feeling jealous of him? You're already punching each other. What does that mean long term?"

He looked into his cup, then placed his glasses on the table. "Of course I'm jealous, but I've chosen to be with you and when you make a choice to be with someone, you live with what follows."

*You're a fool, a lovely fool*, she thought. Desire flashed through her, calculating the time to take him to her sublet. She ignored it. "Arturo, you're pretending the whole thing is sustainable. Even if you're willing to go along with it now, who knows how long that can last."

"As long as it needs to."

"You say that, but I don't like this imbalance. You both might go along now because you'll agree to anything if your alternative is losing me, but after the crisis passes, you might feel differently. You'll want more eventually too, once the"—she waved a hand in the air—"wears off. I've already had one marriage that rotted out from resentment, and I don't want that to happen to us; to have you each quietly bitter towards me in five years."

"Nobody's leaving you."

"You might both. What about when we have children, and there's even less of me to go around? And you've said you don't always know your own emotions until later when you can look back. Maybe you look back and judge me for keeping you both in this."

"That's about temporary moods, not life decisions."

“Whatever they’re about, they scare me. It’s like I’m with the absence of a person when you can’t handle things. And there’s something else,” she said. “I don’t think I like the person I am right now, or who I’m becoming.”

His face grew cloudy. He nodded, but how he felt was unclear: “Here’s the solution,” he said. “You go home tonight and be with your husband like it’s a normal evening, and I’ll stay in Brooklyn and hold down the fort. I’ll stay away for a while, and not reach out.” His flat, even tone suggested his words were rehearsed and reluctant.

“You’re my husband.”

“Nobody wants this threesome. It’s a war of attrition where we all lose. Someone needs to stand aside.”

“We’ll find another solution,” she said, but inside she was already letting him go. He likely saw this release in her eyes, contradicting her words. He and his duplicate had read the writing on the wall, and Arturo was making her path easy by saying aloud the logical conclusions of her own reasoning. He was putting words to what she felt, knowing she couldn’t bear to take that last step over the cliff to separation, but would leave them in this limbo forever.

“It’s been over a month,” Arturo said. “What’s the solution? What’s the other path that we’re overlooking?”

Her thoughts grew uncomfortable: Arturo or Leo? A question she’d denied considering but had weighed heavily. Arturo shouldn’t lose both his job and the marriage, but as a result of the job loss he’d diverged further from pre-split Leonard. Arturo was slightly foreign, acting unexpectedly open and sentimental. Leonard had always been a little that way, but now these traits were amplified. Their night alone had unexpectedly felt like sleeping with a new man. By contrast, Leo remained familiar, and the idea of soon returning home to something more closely approximating what overwhelmed the newness. “Fine,” she said. “Let’s try you moving out, for now.”

“Okay,” he said, looking suddenly antsy, and anxious to leave. “I’ll head out then.”

When she said nothing in response, he stood up.

“Hey,” she said, still seated. “This might be the wrong thing to say, but you can see other people while you’re in Brooklyn. It might be hard for me to hear about, and you don’t need to tell me, but if I’m going to Harlem and you’re not, it wouldn’t be fair for me to expect fidelity.”

Arturo’s face fell. She’d hoped to ease the sting and that a hypothetical dalliance might make things easier to swallow. Instead, he’d heard what was underneath her words: this was a real break, the release of a core vow.

“You have to say that we’re done, or I won’t believe this is really the end.”

She didn’t meet his eyes. “I’ll keep loving you for the rest of my life,” she said. “I swear, but I just can’t physically be with you both. But you’re right. The current arrangement isn’t working.” His fist clenched while she spoke, and her mind flashed to Duncan’s temper. Arturo’s contained demeanor was never worse than these things, but she wished he’d let her feel his anger by shouting or blaming her. She wanted to touch him, to comfort and undo the pain her words caused.

He sat again before responding, absorbing. “Okay,” he said, “then maybe we should talk through some other things.”

“What other things?”

“Divorce,” he said. *That word.* She hated the word. “This will all feel unreal if I have a wife one day, and the next minute I don’t, because of this conversation at a table without anything else. We haven’t done the things that people do when they get divorced. God, what does that even look like, New York still doesn’t have no-fault. Thank your Catholic Church for that. What are we going to say to assign fault? That I messed up by splitting? That you committed adultery with another me?”

“Please don’t make this about the church,” she said. He was needling. She’d once confessed that her skepticism of no-fault divorce remained even after her own separation—saying divorce *should* be hard. “We’ll figure those things out, just like last time.” Last time she let Duncan claim abandonment rather than litigating competing adultery claims to jockey for marital property. In the absence of no-fault laws, the politest way to get a divorce in New York was to live apart for a year.

“I’m not just saying paperwork; also, we need to do the things you do when you have been living together and break up.”

“I don’t know if I’m ready for that,” she said, not knowing what she meant, but knowing she was blurring her request; softening it in a way that was unfair, that would leave questions and hope open in his mind. She tried something firmer. “What things?”

“We should tell people we’re getting divorced. My family, friends. You’re still wearing the ring I placed on your hand, but it’s no longer linked to me.”

She looked down at her wedding ring, instinctually touched it, and looked for his matching ring. She was grateful he hadn’t worn it today. She wouldn’t be able to take it from him for Leo. “I’ll still be going through everything with you inside,” she said. “I’m as devastated. But we can’t have a public thing. It defeats some of the purpose if we’re going to make a street proclamation.” Being image-focused now felt cruel, but what he was asking wouldn’t do anyone good.

“That’s so bloodless. I don’t feel like it will feel real to me, that you’re really lost. How can I move on?”

“I don’t think you see it now, but everyone needs someone who can give them everything of themselves. Not half of my focus. This wouldn’t be good for you long-term either. It would eat us both from inside slowly, and we’d grow resentful and terrible to each other.”

“Don’t pretend this is for me. Only I can decide what I can handle. That’s my choice.”

“Fair enough.” She drank. She didn’t meet his eyes.

She searched herself for something she could give him, anything that might soften the pain on his face. Anything short of renegeing on finally taking a decisive step towards resolving this mess of a marriage.

“I guess that’s it,” he said. “So I understand: you don’t want me to hope that this is really just a short break and that we’ll come back together soon. This is the end of our marriage, right now.”

“Yes, I don’t want you to hope,” she said, low as if she didn’t want him to hear it.

\* \* \*

Already the Spanish Harlem apartment felt unfamiliar. She could trace Leo’s most recent return home with little detective work. He took off his shirt, left by the couch, then got himself a drink, leaving the whiskey bottle out of place, then removed his pants by the bedroom door. Even his reading book was left out of place, having fallen beside the bed.

She collected the clothing, silently moved the bottle to its home and curled up next to him, resisting the temptation to wake him. She liked these tasks, this cleaning up after him, though she didn’t like that she liked doing them. This traditional role made her feel needed, useful, giving him a small comfort that he barely noticed.

“How did oral arguments go?” he asked from the bed, his back to her.

A confused wave of *déjà vu* passing over her, she answered on autopilot. “The most powerful woman in the New York legal community repeated my arguments. It was invigorating.”

“I’m not surprised.”

“No? Why?”

“You’re a really good lawyer.”

She traced his spine. “You don’t think that’s a weird thing to find inspirational? An immigrant kid could go to jail for his whole life.”

He faced her. “Think of all the personal injury firms that describe a brutal slip and fall as a sexy case. And Lucas has a good lawyer defending him, and a prosecutor who understands his circumstances, and who hasn’t fully lost her conscience.”

“Even the galley benches seemed designed to inspire awe, like pews.”

“I know what you mean. They want you to feel some of that gravitas.”

“It worked. I felt something really powerful, a renewed desire to be part of all this. You know?”

“Yeah? Which part?”

“I’m not sure: I still can’t shake the feeling I don’t belong, but I was better than the guy my office sent to argue in front of the Court of Appeals at least. Or I could be a civil rights litigator, a judge maybe.”

“All three, in time. If you duplicate, even sooner.”

She smiled. “Don’t joke, I’ve had phantom moments I thought I might split.” His breath smelled warm, with a light note of the whiskey. “There were all these oil portraits of these old white men in robes, but also Chief Judge Klein was presiding.”

He wiped his face. “Sounds like we’re not moving to Philly after all.”

“No,” she said.

Inhabiting the same conversation twice was an odd, bittersweet thing. It felt like a petite infidelity, but she couldn’t stop herself, wanting to do a test like they did to themselves on their divergences. Regardless, yes, there was something nice about reliving the day’s lunch knowing there wouldn’t be the devastating crash at the end. Now ending instead with what? She didn’t know—a resumption of their marriage?

She carried on, like being in a play where she'd only half-memorized her lines. Leo's understated manner on her arrival combined with Arturo's hints at lunch confirmed that one of them offering to stand aside was a long-discussed plan.

"What is Arturo going to do tonight?" she asked, lowering her voice.

"Wander the streets aimlessly I expect. Probably buy a bottle of whiskey." He leaned back, put his elbow over his eyes. "Shit," he said.

"What? What did you just think?"

He wiped at his face. "Nothing. I really don't know. Just a very lonely night. I can't get in there anymore in the same way as the early days. I can't guess his thoughts. If he was shot, I wouldn't feel that either."

"Can we not compare this to being shot?"

They each let the conversation drop.

After he fell back asleep, she cleaned their apartment enough to return it to a comfortable level of tidiness, occasionally giving the phone an expectant look—both dreading and wanting Arturo to check in.

The two versions of the conversation revealed two versions of the same man who loved her. Arturo had every right to be snippy with her. Would he eventually hate her for cutting him out? Did he already?

The phone stayed silent and, finally, she went to her familiar spot on the couch with her pillow and light sheet to prepare the shortened brief for the Court of Appeals.

Leo came out of the bedroom, startling her.

"I just had a strange dream," he said, only half-awake. "It was about this black kid, maybe ten, eleven. I saw him a few weeks ago."

"What was it? Just a black kid in Harlem?"

“Mostly. He was biking with his friends and he had a cast that took up his whole arm, from wrist to elbow. He just biked by me for a second. I wanted to ask him if he had the doctor set his cast in his biking posture. I love the fact that he didn’t let a broken arm stop him. The whole block was burnt out behind him and he was pretty clearly poor, and the bike was probably the one object he really valued.”

“You dreamt the image?” She wanted to confirm this was a simple story of resilience, and that she wasn’t the bike or the duplication a broken arm. Especially after the sculpture business.

“I saw the kid in real life a few weeks ago. In my dream, I did an oil painting, the way you can picture a painting but not have the skill to paint it. I think I could do a series based on Harlem right now. That and the nurse you mentioned who had blood on her shoes in the Urgent Care.”

She smiled. “My Norman Rockwell.”

“Gritty Rockwell, a new genre of art.”

“Come here,” she said. “Thank you for getting that I couldn’t hold onto you both.”

He breathed heavily. “I’m sorry we took so long to offer for one of us stand aside.”

He picked up her hand and guided her to the bed.

There, they undressed silently. She didn’t feel sexy or desirous but expected he might need physical contact as reassurance. He declared love in her ear the whole time, as he always had. As he did, she realized that these words had been mostly absent from the threesomes. As though something about his duplicate’s presence made him too self-conscious for simple, repetitious sentiment. Usually his whispering made her more comfortable talking dirty—a feedback loop where he said loving things, which let her feel comfortable saying whorish things, which made him love her more achingly.

This night, his ‘I love you’s sounded sad but intense.

Instead of replying with something dirty, she said, 'I love you,' back each time, seeking to convey "I'm not going to leave you."

She was caught by surprise when he came inside her, felt somehow absolved by this intimate act of the sin of leaving his duplicate, and cradled his head against her neck and held him there tightly as he went straight to sleep.

## **PART TWO: 1970**

On June 24, 1970, Catarina scheduled to meet Leonard alone for drinks for the first time.

Five months earlier, they'd met through Maddie in a coffee shop. All three were working in the same area, so they started lunching together with Maddie; then they exchanged some books they liked; then they lunched alone to discuss them; then he'd mailed a short letter to her work about politics and life, and she wrote something back hand delivered to the car dealership. Leonard never asked about Catarina's husband Duncan, and she rarely mentioned him unless it was a frustration. Once she'd invited him to a party that she and Duncan were hosting and the evening had been awkward and confusing. Now they saw each other several times a week for lunch and sometimes after work but always then with Maddie present. What all of this communication meant was never discussed but always thick in the air between them.

Things couldn't move further for obvious reasons, yet as he'd walked to help her find a taxi after an after-work drink with Maddie they'd shared a first kiss on a street corner. Just before the kiss, he'd waved down a taxi for her. The kiss went on so long, and was so passionate that the cabbie they'd hailed had honked, shouted they should get a room, and driven off. They'd kissed in full public for several minutes like teenagers with no private place to be. After they'd found a second taxi, he'd whispered that when she was ready, she could move in with him. She'd responded by ducking into the taxi, smiling up at him, fully kissing him one more time then inhaling deeply so that her breasts swelled then receded against her work-clothes. Then she looked sad and conflicted, and suggested drinks alone after work the next day.

The next day, during Leonard's lunchtime at the used car lot, he journaled while keeping an eye on the outdoor showroom from the breakroom. A coworker had just sold a Studebaker to an old, WASPy woman—a customer demographic that Leonard had a reputation of pulling in well. His coworker would now pull ahead in the breakroom tally whiteboard of monthly sales, a contest that

felt hugely important only weeks earlier, but now seemed detached from Leonard's life. Odd how the world went on obliviously in its routines during times of personal internal crisis.

Leonard wrote in his journal:

Falling in love with a married woman is a bad idea.

She will lend you a book that she loves, and you will be halfway through it and come across a slip of paper saying, "I walked Holmes. Don't study too late, Cat-Duncan." You have to determine what to do with this slip of paper. You can't tell her, because it would hurt her to realize she neglected to remove all traces of marital love. Keeping it seems odd. So, you throw it out on the subway platform and say nothing of how it makes you feel.

You learn things you wouldn't expect. For example, most bookstores now have a section on healing broken marriages, right next to the divorce section. As Catarina browsed after learning of Duncan's affair, an older woman said over her shoulder, "Oh sweetie. I've been through that section." The woman then turned to a saleslady and waved at the divorce section. "I'll take all of them."

Catarina loaned a few to me. They can be painfully repetitious and full of obviously terrible advice. For example, have your husband get rid of all his female friends. Each and every book assumed that preserving the marriage was always the best option, stressing that second marriages are more likely to fail and the problem was often you. But in other ways the books are dead on. You really are a cliché. It often begins with an emotional affair. Men often cheat on their spouses as a physical thing. Women cheat more for emotional connection. Being in love is used by both sexes as self-justification for licentiousness. The cheater will very rarely reveal to the person she cheats with the true extent to which they have love for the betrayed partner—you only see hints of their past happiness (couples Halloween costumes of Louis Lane and Superman).

And then there are the common questions: Is she doing this to get back at him? Am I doing this because it is so wrong? How can we ever trust each other when our origins are cheating?

But the single largest question that repeats and repeats and repeats in my head is "will she leave him?" This has become a point of obsession that I cannot see beyond. This moment—her actually leaving him, is a future as unknowable as the afterlife. At that moment, everything will be known. Faith rewarded. We will become legitimate and no longer be living in mortal sin (here I am taking on

the language of her Catholicism). You can meet her family; maybe even eventually visit them during the holidays.

But you can't push her; you can't let on how much you think of this because push too far, too hard, too fast, and she'll be overwhelmed. You can never let on how badly you want this, so you will her towards it. You can never let on that you, too, secretly fear that love might evaporate—because she's watching carefully for any indication of hesitancy on your part. You can't push too hard because you are asking for her to give up a decade of her life and nobody has the right to ask that. It's a gift she can give, but that can't be fairly demanded. It's the single greatest leap of faith that is possible. It's the voluntary departure from the known into the unknown.

It is trying to imagine life after death.

\* \* \*

In the taxi to the meeting, Catarina debated heavily whether to wear her wedding ring. A diamond at the center held in place by two gold leaves. Smaller diamonds circled it. Duncan's mother had chosen it.

Her relationship with the ring had gone through many stages. At first, wordless elation. Next, as law school began, it shielded her from certain unwanted attention. The only men who still hit on her were the true dogs and the odd absentminded fellow that she could shut down by taking a long sip from a straw with her ringed hand.

Then, she felt like she was missing out. Only about a dozen other women were in her program, and they all found each other quickly. Many were married like Catarina, but Catarina's favorite classmates weren't, and she felt left out. By waiting a few extra years her single friends were more themselves and pickier about what they wanted. The ring stood between her domestic life and her friends who went out together prowling, or just dancing on nights she couldn't join. Interviewing for jobs, she followed the advice of a woman from Columbia's career services and took the ring off during interviews. The career services lady said it wasn't a flirtatious thing, and often hiring personnel thought married woman were more likely to quit to start families.

Then, after Catarina learned about Duncan's affair, the ring felt simultaneously like a grounding reminder of their initial love and marital vows, and the pain of his betrayal. She'd picked at it like a scab as she'd melodramatically told her new therapist that she didn't care about living.

Finally, with drinks set with Leonard, with her heart leaping towards him, the ring was a physical reminder of the promise to Duncan that she'd need to break to be with Leonard.

Wearing the ring for this conversation felt important, to make the situation real to him: what he would be taking on if they moved forward, that would have impact outside of their own lives. Of course, Duncan's ring wasn't the only thing he'd given her—everything from her work clothes to her law school tuition had been provided by him. He'd selected their apartment overlooking Central Park (who *wouldn't* want to live in an apartment overlooking Central Park?), which had taken into account her commute to law school. She hadn't needed to think about money since they'd married—the word “budget” had grown foreign in recent years.

His money paid for her haircut, nail polish, perfume, glasses and everything else on her body except her skin itself. He'd given her the emotional support to get through college and encouraged her interest in law school. Even her identity felt unmoored with Duncan removed. What kind of music did she like? And did she like it because she liked it, or because Duncan liked it? He nearly always chose the music they listened to together. His tastes were good, and she wasn't choosy, but she often listened to Joni Mitchell's *Blue* and Joan Baez's *Diamonds & Rust* while he was away—they weren't his style.

The ring summarized it all, though.

In the taxi on her way to meet with Leonard, she questioned herself again what she was about to do. Indulging in her friendship with Leonard began as a distraction and a pleasant alternative point to focus on rather than marital discord. Quickly, his presence rooted and he was close to her thoughts even when he didn't directly appear. When choosing clothing to wear or what

books to read, she'd picture how she appeared to him. She mentioned religion less and idealism more.

Eventually, her increased connection to Leonard felt fraught. If she jumped straight into another relationship, she wouldn't have a chance to craft her own identity outside any partner, to take time as a single woman to figure out her own interests. She should just leave, send a small note to Leonard saying he shouldn't feel obligated to wait for her but she'd love to have a date with him in six months.

Even as this thought crested, another came swiftly behind it twice as powerful, that she didn't want to be away from Leonard ever again. That she wanted to come home to him. What if this was her only chance?

Catarina chose the Metropolitan, the bar that she, Maddie and Leonard typically went to. The bar was close to work, rarely crowded, and her co-workers never went there because it was a cop bar.

How hard to admit to yourself what you were doing: Offering to have an affair, wanting to signal availability, but not wanting his judgmental response. Leonard never seemed judgmental and yet did seem reliably moral, which should also mean he would turn down her overture. But here he was entering through the door the day after kissing her, which meant she was wrong and he wasn't reliably moral. No, that wasn't right. She couldn't judge him for his willingness to do something she wanted to do herself. At minimum they'd be morally unmoored together. Had he done this before? Was it his thing?

The next step was to tell him what brought her to this rendezvous, what made her willing. She felt in control of the pace of their connection in a way she'd never felt during her romance with Duncan. Now she was more mature, confident and aware of what she wanted and offered. Also, in relation to Leonard, she was older, more advanced in her career and experienced in relationships

(for better and worse). Although she was currently starved for emotional and physical connection, even this didn't lessen her steadiness in their pairing given his earnest reciprocation.

Catarina found him in a wooden booth at the back of the bar. She sat across from him, and while they waited for drinks, Leonard imagined how Maddie must act in law school classrooms: raising her hand to break awkward classroom silences because nobody in class except her knew the answers. Catarina agreed, laughing, easily imagining Maddie doing this in high school, though nothing like this had ever happened in law school. Most of her teachers randomly picked students to answer questions rather than asking for volunteers, though Maddie had answered well when called.

Catarina fidgeted with her ring before finally placing it on the table. As the drinks arrived, she let her finger run over the stone. He took her hands in his, and a jolt of electricity ran through her.

"How are car sales?" she asked.

"I was a little distracted so, they gave me the easy gig: the accessories guy," he said.

"The accessories guy?"

"Mud flaps, rubber mats, the upsell. It's the easiest job on the floor, since at that point the customers already been beaten up by the salesman reeling them in. All the accessories guy has to say is 'you're a smart guy; you can buy something later if you see you need it, but if you buy it now, we can bring the add-ons under the financing loan and include them in the warranty.' Trick to closing is to just act like it doesn't matter to you, let them read the pamphlet and pick things out; today was great for me because I really didn't care."

She nodded, admiring his foreign world. "So, why didn't you come to my birthday party on Sunday?" Her tone sounded between hurt and flirtatious.

"I wasn't sure it was an earnest invitation."

“You knew it was. I asked you specifically. I wanted you there and you said you would be.”

“It might have been awkward.”

“Why would it be awkward?”

“Duncan was there, right?” Leonard smiled. “Anyway, everyone would have fancy watches and I’d have to wear the same suit again.”

She laughed. The ‘again’ was a reference to her having Maddie, him, and a woman he’d been dating over for dinner with Duncan. Catarina had still been suppressing the nature of their attraction, even to herself.

“I promise that I’ll never miss another birthday,” Leonard said. “How was the birthday?”

“It was fine. I don’t know. Duncan’s parents were being a little mean and then Duncan added on when I was already on edge. I broke down crying in front of everyone and made a fool of myself. Really, it was good that you weren’t there. You sure you want to be talking to me?”

He rotated his whiskey glass and spoke his answer into it. “What kind of man doesn’t know his wife was upset enough to cry?”

“I’m making him sound awful. He’s really not. He’s been trying really hard—working less. I haven’t been the best partner lately either. What did you think of him? I don’t know why I put you in that situation. I wanted you to see my context, my life.”

“I don’t know. It’s hard not to be biased, given the situation.” He tugged his earlobe. “You know what Maddie told me?”

“What?” she asked.

“Maddie told me ‘I can’t imagine she’s done anything to deserve the punishment of marrying that guy.’”

Catarina laughed and wondered if they both thought she stayed with Duncan for the money. “Does Maddie know about us?”

Leonard smiled unexpectedly, and she realized she'd confirmed they were an "us," a small flame in the air between them. "Maddie?" he said. "Nah. She doesn't pick up on that kind of thing. She wouldn't have joked if she suspected."

"She told me she thought you'd finally started 'nesting' in preparation for someone. I couldn't tell if that was a hint or an innocent question."

"What is nesting?"

"I don't know. She found it very revealing that she caught you a few weeks back smoothing out your historically dry lips with chapstick followed by asking new questions about how to clean and lamp placement. Nesting."

He laughed. "She probably thought it was for someone else, Angela maybe. I scrubbed the stovetop and the bathroom. She said those were the key places."

"Do you agree with her joke? Is Duncan that bad? Are you judging me for having tried to make it work for this long?"

"I only met him at that one dinner. There, he struck me as overly interested in his wine decanter, then he gurgled the wine in his throat like mouthwash. I didn't like how he asked you to get me a clean glass. I sensed he was playacting as the bourgeoisie businessman he'll eventually really be. Otherwise, he seemed okay. Like he'd make a good accountant."

She sighed. "He was stressed from what we've been going through, and wanted to impress everyone with expensive things. I don't know why I thought it was important that you meet. I wanted you to understand my world."

"Yeah." They sipped their whiskey. She stared off into the old photos of men in police uniforms, looking proud.

"Okay," she said, "here goes. Six months ago, I—hold on." She wiped at a tear pooling in her eye with a napkin. "I learned my husband was having an affair. A co-worker. I knew we were

drifting but never—He'd always been busy and when I focused on coursework too, we neglected the relationship. But the affair shattered me. I'd thought that I'd always be all that was necessary and sufficient for him."

"I'm sorry," he said.

She swallowed back more tears. "And my husband is no longer sexually interested in me," she said, unable to meet his eyes. She worried that Duncan's lack of attraction would somehow make her less desirable to Leonard, and that Leonard might fear they would end up sexless too, or that she only wanted to get back at Duncan. *No. No. No. You're much more than that*, she imagined responding to a question, the words on her lips.

Leonard placed his glasses on the table and rested his fingers on the back of her hand lightly. He'd tried to do this the very first night they met—while trying to comfort her crying. Back then, she'd flinched and drawn her hand away. This time she didn't flinch. She swallowed, and asked, "Well?"

"I can work with that," he said.

She laughed. "You can work with that?"

He nodded, he let go of her. "You should know you're really, really, really beautiful and sexy, and your husband must be nuts if he can't see that."

"Thank you," she said in a barely audible whisper, blushing. Then she said louder, "Say more."

"About what?"

"Just talk. What I need right now is to hear you talk more. Just talk. What do you want from this?"

"I want to have a relationship with you. One that lasts a long time."

"Good," she said. "That's good. But how can you want that when you know me so little?"

“I light up near you, thinking of you.” He shrugged. “What do you want?”

“The same thing. I’ve wanted you since the first moment I saw you.”

“And how do you know you want me?”

“I don’t know,” she said. She laughed and stared off at the wood of the walls again. “You never imagine yourself like this,” she said. “Married. Sitting in a bar with dim lights. Planning an affair. Nobody ever imagines themselves in a place like this. What’s happened to me? Why couldn’t I have met you when I was 18?”

Leonard was silent.

She studied his face. “I’ve only told one person about us, about where it feels like we are going. A friend who was in something similar, and who I trust a lot. And she advised me to just leave Duncan if I want to, but stay away from you, and be alone for a while.”

“And do you want to do that?”

She smiled at him. “Maybe we can just see if we can be very, very close friends, and see what happens as time passes. Just, really go slow with the physical stuff.”

He was silent for a time, then broke off eye contact. “We can do that,” he said, leaning back in his chair so it tilted. “Just sort of pretending to be overseas lovers, with your marriage to someone else being the ocean. While maybe also laying down the groundwork for the transition, if it happens.”

Unconsciously, she cracked her knuckles. “Sorry.” Duncan hated that sound.

“No, it doesn’t bother me. Can I try?”

“Cracking your knuckles?”

“No. Cracking yours.”

“I don’t know if it will work.” She offered the hand that she hadn’t just cracked. He took it gently in both hands, bending and stretching her fingers, finding the correct angle, approaching her

body like a puzzle to be solved. For a second, his hands paused and she wondered if his request was a ruse to get their skin to touch and how long she should let it persist, but then he struck and her knuckles cracked.

“Oh,” she said, drawing her hand back sharply. A jolt travelled through her.

“Sorry, sorry, sorry,” he said.

“No, it felt good. It felt really, you know, satisfying. I was just surprised. You can do it again sometime.”

He left his hand on the table, and she put hers halfway back to his. He cupped her hands in his and rubbed her knuckles, then squeezed the webbing near her thumb. It felt like a kiss.

“Would you like to see a squat?” he asked, eyeing the exit.

“A what?” she asked, covertly sliding her wedding ring from the table into her purse.

“A squat—it’s like a normal apartment except you don’t pay rent.”

“What am I going to do with you?”

\* \* \*

The building was close to Tompkins Square. They walked the whole way, slowly, savoring it.

The building was derelict, unsurprisingly, and had the look of an old tenement house, with about four apartments on each floor. On the stoop was a group of young Latin teenagers wearing leather, smoking indifferently. When they saw her, the one girl with them gave Catarina a knowing smile and nod.

As they walked, Catarina rambled to Leonard about what the teenager outside his building might have thought as they entered: Catarina was dressed too professionally to be an escort, and their hand holding suggested Catarina wasn’t there for drugs. Maybe the teenager thought that Catarina was a classy uptown Chicana, and had hired Leonard to cheat on her husband? A young

housewife, already bored. Catarina's thoughts were only half-expressed, and Leonard was only half-listening, but both were smiling and tipsy.

The entrance to his squat was unlocked and they took the stairs up several flights. The air had a mildew funk and she was grateful for the dimness. He warned her to be careful not to scrape her skin against the textured walls of the darkened hallways. The apartment next to his had plastic over the door, which he peeled back to reveal a room.

"Dean lived there," he said. "Two, no, three years ago. I guess nobody else wants it."

She didn't ask who Dean was. She liked how he spoke as if she already knew.

To her relief, his actual apartment was unlike the rest of the building. It was neither neat nor fancy, but felt warm, overstuffed with loved objects. An upright piano almost bumped into the dining table, such that you could turn around from playing and eat a meal. Catarina plunked a few notes, and was pleased to find it mostly in tune. Deodorant on the kitchen table, books in stacks everywhere, shirts on the floor. Bookshelves and art, mismatched but somehow consistent wooden furniture.

"It's all found stuff, no surprise. I like this one a lot. That can be yours." He gestured to a pale-yellow secretary desk full of notebooks and paperwork.

"How is there even electricity?" she said, flicking a light on and off, mesmerized.

"We run a wire to the factory across the street."

"How would you even—"

"I'm kidding. I just pay Con-Ed."

"Fucking asshole," she said, throwing a chair pillow.

"Yeah, they don't care who sends money. A lawyer told me if I pay long enough, we can even get a deed, and make the whole thing legal. Maybe you can represent me."

“I’ve a future representing day laborers, I can’t be affiliated with scoundrels,” she said.

“Might taint my credibility.”

He grasped her wrist, and she gasped. He led her into his room, which was mostly his bed, a bedside table, lamp and his dresser. She fell with him onto the mattress, her arm on his chest. The bedsheets were fresh and, she guessed, prepared the evening before. Still, his dirty clothing was strewn about the floor.

“I admire that you want to be a poor-person lawyer,” he said. “I imagine that in your circles there’s pressure to go for the money if they can. My father’s childhood friend does car crash cases. He’s the only attorney I’ve ever met in person. And he was my idea of a rich person growing up. The money you talk about your classmates expecting to make, I almost can’t wrap my head around it.”

“Duncan teases me about my idealism, but I know he’s genuinely proud even if he doesn’t understand the impulse,” she said. “You could become a lawyer, and help people too.”

He laughed.

“I’m serious. You’re smarter than most of my law school.”

“Galletti and Flores LLP, poor-people lawyers. Has a ring to it.”

She smiled. “Sounds profitable.” Internally, unease surfaced. How would her dreams need to be adjusted with Leonard? Duncan’s support—while he took the unthreatened role of breadwinner—allocated realms neatly. Perhaps he’d shift his views as he matured, if he went to graduate school or moved up, when the time came to raise a family. He still had an air of youth. She examined the bedroom, and registered how squalid and chaotic everything was compared her home.

He caught her taking everything in, and looked around himself. “What do you think?” he asked, his tone vulnerable. He sometimes read her emotions uncomfortably well.

“This space is nice. A little messy, but cozy. Really reflects who you are. I like the plants,” she said. “But I’ll need to report back that you may have valiantly attempted to clean but lost the battle.”

He laughed in a pleased way that revealed he’d never stop being messy.

“When you brought Angela to dinner with Duncan,” she said. “I had this moment of fear, that she was so pretty, so blonde, that you’d already moved on.”

“I hadn’t.”

“If you want to keep seeing her, I’m not in a position to ask you to stop seeing anyone. Maybe it would keep use balanced.”

“After you and I scheduled drinks, I told her I couldn’t anymore. Maybe if we had been more serious. But it’s just too much, another person in the equation.”

“How did she take it?”

“Surprised. She thought perhaps that she hadn’t put enough in, let herself fall for me enough. She’ll move on.” He shrugged in a sad way that hinted the breakup had been hard. She pictured Angela crying, wondered where he had told her, what specifically had been said, if Catarina had come up or been suspected, and of others who would be hurt by her choices. She touched his hand.

“Hold on,” he said, and excused himself to the restroom.

She considered moving back to the living room, to the safety of the couch, or even further, out of this place. Instead, she waited for him on his bed cross-legged, her hand feeling the texture of the bedframe and sheets. She closed her eyes and imagined his return and what might happen and, as she did this, an overwhelming wave of arousal blanked out all her thoughts. She clenched the bedsheet in her fist until the feeling passed.

Leonard looked surprised that she'd stayed put. He stood over her and looked at her with a question in his eyes. He shut the door and sat next to her. She watched him do this, her breath quickening. He took off her glasses and placed them on the bedside table.

"I can't really see without those," she said.

"I love you," he said. This caught her off guard. Once he'd said that he'd never declared love to anyone, never been in love. How could he say it now? How could he know? But it felt wrong to ask. Her skin tingled. Without her glasses, she watched his every blurry movement with care, as he did the same, hovering around each other.

"Alright," she said. He became rigid. "I think," she said, "that I might be falling in love with you too."

His shoulders relaxed and he touched her cheek. She wished he would hurry, but he kissed her slowly, and she got all shaky which made him more passionate. He started repeating that he loved her, and what she expected to be carnal became something more and less.

He removed her top and bra, which she allowed passively, though she covered her nipples with her hands as soon as the bra was gone. He nuzzled her hands aside and sucked her nipples one at a time. She touched his cheek as he did this, re-covering herself when he switched breasts. Her brain became a mess. He reached his hands behind his neck and removed his shirt, removed his pants, then pushed her onto her back.

With her dress pants still on, he pinned her wrists tightly above her head with one hand and pushed his cock into her mouth and began to thrust. Playfully, not wanting to really escape, she struggled to liberate her wrists. His free hand jerked from her breast to her butt to her side, like he couldn't decide what skin he desired the most, a need to touch all of her at once in a physically impossible way.

She stopped struggling and left her hands above her head even after he released her. He peeled off her dress pants and cupped her pussy lips, looking in her eyes. She nodded. Her body become softer and wetter and willing to let him do anything. Her legs felt like she would fall if she tried to stand.

Abruptly, and frustratingly, Leonard stopped and lay down next to her. “Cat,” Leonard said. “I feel like I would die if you left this apartment at this moment, before we finish. Like I would die.”

She smiled in response. He took her under the covers, but when he started to make his way down, she pushed his head away. “I don’t like that. Please don’t.” Duncan had once tried, and she felt self-conscious, so she’d discouraged him.

He stopped and his face reappeared next to hers. She squeezed his cock tightly and he fumbled with her breasts, and from there she felt neither of them had control.

“Oh Duncan,” she moaned, and froze in horror. He paused too.

“It’s okay,” Leonard whispered, then kissed her.

The moment passed.

“Please, let me go down on you,” Leonard said. Something in his certainty and hunger led her to spread her legs. It felt unfamiliar and her old self-consciousness returned. What did it mean that he wanted his face down there? What was he tasting? Would he find it unpleasant? Then her thoughts shut off and there was only his eager tongue and her fingers raking his hair.

This stopped too soon, and he fumbled to get a condom on. Barely able to see what was happening, she hoped he knew what he was doing. She felt the wet sandpaper grain of his black stubble, wanted to bring his face up close for a kiss. She stroked his chin and cheek as he fumbled with himself. Then he whispered in her ear that he loved her again, and he was inside her and thrusting.

He collapsed on her before she even came close to orgasm. His relaxed body felt good on hers. They disentangled and lay side by side, only touching at the ankles. Wordlessly, she placed his head against her breast, stroked his hair and told him everything was okay. She did this sometimes with Duncan after sex, but Leonard looked confused, maneuvered away. She was afraid that he'd leave for the bathroom or some other excuse; she braced for it—knowing shame or hollowness would rush in if he left the bed too quickly. What if his desire went away now that he'd had her? He made a heavy, satisfied exhale noise and pulled her against him by the small of the back, her breasts firmly against his chest. Everything felt new. She just let her body feel where it was. A feeling of warmth coursed through her and she clawed at his chest—signaling approval, signaling lust, signaling love.

“Was that okay?” she asked.

“I've never had sex with someone I loved before,” he said. “It was intense.”

“Does it feel different?” she asked.

“Deeper, fuller, more glowing. I'm afraid I'll lose you. Every moment.”

“You won't,” she said. She was sure and unsure simultaneously, but she buried this. “I should get going.”

She moved away and dressed, still without glasses. She knew he had told the truth, but for her, if this unstable feeling was love, then Leonard was her second or third. She *still* “loved” Duncan, but was also now “in love” with Leonard. Leonard deserved someone less divided. Perhaps in time he might downgrade this moment, this whole night, to infatuation, a temporary madness. An urge came to share all this with him, but he was feeling no pain right now. He was on a cloud. She breathed deep and resolved to share it anyway, to share everything with him forever. “I think I might love you,” she said instead, hiding her tears.

“It’s painful to watch you put clothes on,” he said. “But I like how you look with a top but no bottom, when I can see just your butt cheeks.”

She shook her head. “You’ll see it all again soon enough,” she said, then moved closer and kissed him clumsily. “What am I going to do with you?”

As she tried to leave the bed again, he pulled her towards him and kissed her until the time came to make love again.

He didn’t reach for a condom this time. He was declaring love like a fool, and each physical step was so gradual and organic that the significance only registered as he thrust.

“That’s right, Leonard,” she said. “Get me pregnant and make me yours once and for all.” The taunt came out with an edge of anger. He slowed but didn’t stop. The sex stopped feeling sexy. Then, he sped up. *Lord, he wants to, he wants to, he’s going to.* “Come inside me,” she said more softly. “Come.” With one more declaration of love, he did.

He remained on top, flaccid inside her. Her fingers danced on his back, her mind swirling at what her request, her flash of anger and his response meant—Was he really in this? Was she? The single most reckless act of her life, and her fingers danced.

He slowly rolled over. She didn’t put her clothes on again but smoked a cigarette and closed her eyes. Underneath the lids her eyes tingled from the cigarette smoke.

“You know I dreamed about doing this just last night?” he asked. “About you.”

She rolled onto her stomach and looked at him playfully, sensually, touching his leg. “Tell me, in detail, everything you remember.”

“It’s silly.”

“That’s fine, come on.” She smacked his thigh. “We’re so far past that.”

“Okay, so my dreams tend to be like penny dreadful stories. I go on quests and battle evil things—pirates or dragons, random creatures my mind invents. And I tend to be, like, the hero.”

She started laughing, smiling, and licking her lips. “Sometimes I save a beautiful maiden halfway through and last night, it was dragons—okay, you’re laughing. You’re straight up laughing. I see you. It’s actually pretty scary at the time, because I don’t know I’m dreaming.”

“No don’t stop, please, please don’t stop. I love you so much right now it actually physically hurts. You’re such a boy.” His hand squeezed her side. She hadn’t qualified her declaration of love with “I think” this time. She lifted her cigarette high and kissed him, then put her free hand over his. “And where was I in this dream?”

“You were chained in this castle, not like a dungeon, just like a room and this forest was on fire outside—set by the dragon’s breathing flames, and we could feel the heat through this open window, and you were so grateful that I came for you. We had sex as the bad things closed in—the fire and the dragons. Then off to do battle.”

“You know, you’re such an interesting person.” She sucked the cigarette and blew away from him. “I did not expect a response like that—at all.”

“Don’t all guys dream in action-adventure?”

“I’ve never heard that before,” she said, “but I guess I’m missing out. Look, I shouldn’t make fun, I loved *The Black Caldron*. The assistant pig-keeper who saves Princess Gwydion, and so I shouldn’t make fun, but I—” She tilted her head sideways. “What are your parents like? Are they big readers too?”

“Huge readers,” Leonard said. “They’re characters. They met while they were working for this roving Marxist group that would target an employer, demand a union, then quit and move onto the next employer.”

She coughed and passed him her cigarette to hold onto. She looked at him, and saw he was watching her reaction carefully. “Are you serious?”

“Scout’s honor. Everything from bookstores to one of those places that swapped out batteries in those electronic cars before those companies folded. All heart no money, everybody says.”

“I’m so—” Catarina almost said ‘sorry’ about how rough that must have been, but caught herself. He wasn’t sorry. He passed the cigarette back, and she stubbed it out, sat up and turned her back to him. Over her shoulder, she thought he looked spent. “They sound fascinating. I want to hear more about them. Could you pass my glasses?”

As she dressed again, she was hit with a sinking dread that she couldn’t imagine their families meeting, that she and Leonard could never marry and merge their lives.

She squeezed his arm, thinking he was thinking something similar. “I have a distinct memory of being in a plastic pool in my mother’s boss’s backyard in Philly. It was a really hot day and these strange splashes happened around me in the kiddie-pool. I looked around but couldn’t place the source until I heard this giggling. It was my parents and they were giggling like children up on a second-floor balcony, throwing down ice cubes from my father’s empty drink.”

“That’s a nice memory.”

“It’s the only memory I have of my parents being happy together, with each other—not with me or my sister or something else. You know, just the two of them. They got divorced the year my sister went to college. Just holding out till we were gone from the apartment.” She rolled onto her side. His eyes were focused and vulnerable. “Leonard, I don’t want a marriage like that.”

“Okay. Then we’ll do it differently.”

She nodded, then smiled. “Say it: You’ll be my assistant pig-keeper who saves me from the castle and takes your reward for saving the maiden.” She placed her hands above her head and locked them as if chained to the headboard. “Tell me what reward you want for saving me. Tell me, hmm? Hmm?”

He left the bed and walked away. She feared he'd leave her alone, and that she'd never see him again—her life emptied of him abruptly and without ceremony. Instead, he quietly poured himself more whiskey, misjudging in the dark so that the room started smelling of it.

“You can move, tonight,” he said. “Cat, will you marry me?”

“Yes,” she said. “But Leo, you're too late. I'm already married. I'm just going to hurt you—hurt us both, and others.” A path to save her troubled marriage came to her, full of pain and hard conversations. She'd renew her vow to Duncan and confess this very moment. She and Leonard could diminish what this brief period meant—a carnal, impulsive, foolish use of hours. She'd tried on a new face, a new identity, and how was this version of herself better or more helpful than who she was with Duncan already? How? No reasonable soul would consider slipping into this life.

“Yes, you've been a married woman for several years now. I know, I know. With a fine husband, a fine career path, a fine life.” He stood in the half-light, smiling like he could see their whole future, and shot his whiskey. The fool. She wanted to bite his neck and never let go. “I suppose then,” he continued, “the fundamental question is: what do you want to do with the rest of our lives?”

## **PART THREE: 1977**

### **Chapter One**

On September 7—as the record summer heat finally gave way to fall—a letter arrived at the Spanish Harlem apartment from Winthrop Ashe addressed to Arturo Galletti.

The eighth was the democratic primary, and to vote, Arturo had to go to his old designated station, Catarina’s church. He spent about an hour with the pollworker explaining the situation, anxiously expecting to see Catarina though knowing she likely voted in the morning. Father Torres was helping out, and vouched for the truth of Arturo’s situation. After succeeding in voting for Cuomo, he stopped by the apartment to pick up the letter from a curious Leo. Leo hadn’t opened it given its addressee, and hadn’t been able to reverse-engineer how it arrived. Arturo didn’t explain, but asked that Leo let him know immediately if anything else appeared.

The letterhead was so thick and pulpy that Arturo could tell it came from a tree, making other paper seem downright limp. Oren Danby—who Arturo had beaten in court the day Arturo and Catarina ended things—had come through with an interview for Arturo. Arturo was invited to arrive at Winthrop Ashe’s downtown Manhattan office on September 14, have lunch with Oren and another associate, and then interview with three partners over the course of the afternoon.

Before Arturo’s fateful lunch with Catarina, Arturo and Leo had split their clothing in anticipation of a move. They had three pairs of dress shoes: two black (one decent, one ratty from car sales days) and one brown (essentially pristine). Arturo got the lousy black and pristine brown ones. This helped divide other work clothes, since Leo couldn’t wear styles requiring brown shoes. Arturo got the three-piece suit because he’d be interviewing.

The morning of September, Arturo bought the *Daily News* and the *Post*. The front pages were about Son of Sam and the heading runoff between Cuomo and Koch for mayor, but Arturo breezed through these to the sports sections. Arturo only cared about sports when he ended up on a

crowded 4 train full of Yankee fans, but professional men loved to talk sports—a safe, apolitical, unemotional topic. If they liked different teams, there was friendly ribbing. Apparently, Reggie Jackson was finally playing well and it looked like the Yankees were in a close race with the Orioles and Red Sox for the division.

The lunch interview was at a restaurant in Little Italy where there were no signs of stagflation. Men in business suits drank whiskey and smoked cigars, and on the wall were signed photos of Frank Sinatra and Humphrey Bogart. As they walked in, a man paying his bill said “Here’s a little extra for the boys in the kitchen. Food was excellent.” He licked his thumb and added several twenties to his tab from a roll of bills. A live band played something approximating jazz.

A waiter cleared bread crumbs from their table with a metal scraper. Oren ordered wild boar. His colleague, a Yale-rower-type, got a steak. Arturo ordered a basic pasta carbonara, afraid to spill on his shirt, and even this tasted exceptional. The peppery fresh pasta had an improbable hole running through the center that gave each bite the perfect give. But the lunch was confusing; the food was fancier than any meal Arturo had ever had, yet Oren complained everything was too oily.

They made Arturo take out his interview letter and went one by one, giving him advice on how to tackle each interview. “Kennedy just likes giving these big grand speeches about financial prudence and how every company is an idiot with money. But he’s a complete hypocrite: he’s currently building a skating rink in his basement after his youngest daughter saw Dorothy Hamill in the Olympics.”

“What, with ice and everything?”

“Some kind of fake ice. His daughter will live at home for, what, another seven years? Assuming she stays interested. My parents were annoyed I left a drum kit in our basement. Imagine him looking at that skating rink a decade from now.”

“Nah, he’ll just pay another ten-grand to tear it out,” Arturo said. They laughed with camaraderie. After the meal, the two current associates headed to the bathroom and stayed long enough for the bill to arrive. Arturo looked around at the other diners. He had a growing suspicion he’d been the victim of a prank. When do two men go together to a bathroom? That’s a woman thing. He’d beat this kid in the courtroom, but now he felt an odd sense of inadequacy, of being found out, and kicked out. He peeked at the lunch tab and it was more than he had on him, more than his and Catarina’s monthly budget. He weighed trying to explain versus writing a check and fighting later.

The other two associates returned, laughing, at him? Had they seen his anxiety while peeking at the bill? No, they were caught up in their own joke, oblivious to him.

“Let’s get some coffee. Hey, waiter, no check, okay? Hey, you ever seen any mafia stuff?” the second attorney asked, suddenly more jovial. Arturo winced.

“Hey, don’t ask him that,” Oren said, smacking Arturo on the shoulder. “Don’t feel you need to answer. We’ve got other Italians in the office. What’s his name, Salvador in real estate? And that old guy.”

“I didn’t ask because he’s Italian. We’re eating at a nice Italian restaurant, right, and the guy works in Brooklyn. Made me think of it. I didn’t know he was Italian.”

“Actually, I have seen that stuff a couple times. Before I was doing immigration, last time I did more freelance stuff,” Arturo said softly. He had their full attention. He told the story of two friends with a small Italian granite importation business that had had some good years, quarrying for the Cloisters way uptown and some of the museums on the upper west side. During their peak, they’d each taken insurance out on the other’s life, an available protection for small companies for the loss of a co-owner. The granite business had dried up and one partner had died suspiciously. It

was a contract case—the widow came to Arturo’s firm because other attorneys were nervous about it (here in the story Arturo touched his nose, as the widow had). The Ivy-league boys ate it up.

“What did I tell you about this guy? Forget-about-it. Let’s go get him a job.” Oren chummily punched Arturo’s arm. “Love that fucking suit.” He turned to his colleague and pointed his thumb at Arturo. “You know this guy wore some shit to the case we had together. I was afraid you’d show up like that today. Man’s a shark. Hey, anything we can answer for you before you go in?”

“What’s the worst part of the job? The thing people don’t ask about when they come in.”

Oren twitched a little. “The billable hour Godhead. Winthrop’s associate target to stay in good standing, i.e., get a bonus, is 2,000 hours.”

“What does that mean, practically speaking?” Arturo asked. He had a general sense that that was a high number, but couldn’t do the math. Neither he nor Catarina had ever had a job with billable hours.

“As the crow flies, you could hit that with nine hours a day and still have time left to take your wife on a long ski vacation in December, but in the real world there’s slow periods so it’s more like you bill two hours a day until a deal hits and then you don’t see daylight for a month,” Oren said.

“But if you’re here, you’re here,” Arturo said. “They can’t hold it against you if there’s no work.”

Oren shook his head. “You would think. That’s billable hours, not normal person hours. The rub is only certain types of hours count: you can’t bill time spent fiddling your dick waiting for work, studying up, pro bono, or interviewing for new associates. And they say they want 2,000, but realistically you need to hit 2,400 for seven years to have a shot at partner. I billed 2,500 hours last year. Bankruptcy is booming.”

The other guy nodded. “2,100 hours here. Litigation.”

“Below 1,800 hours you’re quietly asked to find other another job,” Oren said. “Right now, people in mergers and acquisitions are having trouble scrounging together. Mid-levels are hoarding work that should got to first years. There are just no deals right now unless it’s hostile takeovers which isn’t really our wheelhouse. But the raw hours aren’t even the worst bit; it’s more the unpredictability. They’re paying you so much for availability, not smarts. Most evenings and weekends are fucked. You have no idea how many times I’ve needed to cancel plans on Isabel. But she’s a good girl, she gets it.” Oren looked suddenly exhausted and Arturo noticed his eyes were a bit droopy and dilated. He sniffed hard and the other guy sniffed too, and their long trip to the bathroom clicked: cocaine.

As they walked to the law offices, Oren asked if Arturo’s wife was Catarina Flores. Although he asked this casually, Arturo sensed Oren had been itching to raise this connection. Oren explained he’d attended Columbia with Catarina and married Isabel Santiago, another Latina student. “They have a musk, don’t they? Latin women? They’re so emotional, but so errrrr. It turns me on when she gets mad, and being mad and being aroused are like here and here in her mind.” He squeezed his thumb and fingers together.

This new information unbalanced Arturo. Catarina was right about the smallness of the legal world. Perhaps everything did get out.

“I love how Cat smells after a run,” Arturo said, not wanting to contradict Oren, but not wanting to endorse his statement either. Despite exoticizing his own wife, Oren seemed to view Arturo as a blue-collar version of himself.

Oren nodded to the response, then squeezed Arturo’s shoulders fraternally and shouted to the street. “Yeah, let’s get this motherfucker a job!”

\* \* \*

Like the restaurant, signs of recession didn't reach inside Winthrop Ashe. Along the halls were original Hudson River and Ashcan paintings of men boxing, fishing, hunting, and Babe Ruth swinging. The largest painting was of men standing around exchange chairs, stock ticker paper piled around them—implying without subtlety that finance was just another macho competition.

The firm's Downtown Water Street lobby window was broad enough to overlook the full city, the Chrysler building in the far distance, and the Hudson River—evoking a sort of mastery or ownership. No wonder the people who worked in big shot towers or castles got big heads. Just standing there felt heady, and reminded him that even if some of the immigration firm clients were wealthy or mid-sized companies doing H-1Bs, Arturo had by and large been a poor-person lawyer.

A woman from Human Resources took him into a conference room with glass doors, where he signed application documents asking about prior salaries, desired salaries and the like. She calmly explained that if offered an attorney position, he would be coming in as a contract attorney, not a partner-track associate. This was because, officially, under The Winthrop System they didn't hire laterals, only straight from law school or clerkships. This was to maintain Winthrop's culture whereupon all new associates spent the first years rotating between partners in several practice areas before specializing. Unofficially, if Arturo worked hard and the right partners noticed, he could quietly be placed on partner track within a few years. He translated her spiel as a suggestion hiring him was a hedge—talent to develop in the event the economy picked up and they needed to ramp up; someone who they could easily drop if it didn't. He was returned to the lobby.

Waiting for what felt like hours, he wondered if getting this position might help get Catarina back. A foolish thought but perhaps. She'd said he should go for the position at their final lunch. When they'd smoked pot, she'd hinted that she wouldn't mind having higher salaries. Something was cynical about this hope: they'd always talked about a good life as one that pursued dreams, financial ruin be damned; if Catarina was lured back by his financial success that was all collective

self-delusion. Still, a higher income might give the three of them more space to not be on top of each other, less stress about bills. They could hire a maid and he could be as messy as he liked. Maybe another woman to balance the relationship, like Joyce suggested. And if you were successful enough then your personal life eventually stopped mattering. Perhaps from the perch of Winthrop Ashe's high floor he could open doors for her to work for the feds. They definitely had a line into the Southern District and Second Circuit.

Just to do something, he excused himself to the restroom and checked his look in the mirror. Even the restroom was cavernous and grand, with thick paper towels that were almost cloth. He was sweaty from the heat.

A loud, metallic "whrrrr" sound startled him while washing his hands. Around the corner was an electronic shoeshine. The young lawyer using it looked up at Arturo accusingly.

"Fancy," Arturo said. The young lawyer shrugged.

When he returned to the lobby, the secretary told him the first interview would be delayed a few minutes, but the rest of the interviewers would know. The tall-ceilinged lobby was crisply air-conditioned. This felt like an indulgence; Arturo had never lived or worked in an air-conditioned space and they had it running even though the heat spell had broken.

He returned to his chair. Something in all the masculine paintings had lit a fire in him, filled him with sense of purpose, but the whirr of the bathroom shoe-shine burst this. Oren's dilated coke eyes flashed across his mind. What was Arturo doing here? A desperate moonshot to repair something he couldn't repair? Was he Winthrop Ashe material? After years of cautioning Catarina against becoming a capitalist workaholic he was going into the belly of the beast? Would that impress her? Everyone knew Winthrop Ashe was a big deal. Even the firms a tier beneath them didn't recruit from Fordham. Maybe he'd be the first alumnus ever to work there. If he did get the job, would he get anything more than a quick phone call from Catarina congratulating him? A two-

minute phone call that perhaps he could stretch into five. Pathetic. Was he just feeling so emasculated from losing his job and wife that he was doing anything to regain control of his life? He could get a new, younger wife. One who wasn't so caught up in work, who had more straightforward expectations, with less pressure on him to be a high achiever at shifting metrics of success. Did money, ideals or prestige count most to Catarina? Perhaps all of them mattered to different degrees at different times.

What if he didn't get hired? Back to freelancing for Augie? He had expenses, a new place to pay for, new things. His own life was a separate thing now; he wasn't supporting another person's career but pursuing his own. Who knew if it would work, or if any act would repair the marriage? He had to try *something*, not just sit and wait, and this was something radical.

The secretary called his name.

The first partner Arturo met was a hefty but dapper old white man. He was eager to share that he'd been dining at Windows of the World—the restaurant on top of World Trade Center with views overlooking the Manhattan skyline as the lights went out. They'd stayed for hours with no AC, slowly removing their jackets and ties in defiance of the usually stringent dress code. Finally, he lifted Arturo's resume.

“*Summa Cum Laude*. Impressive. I've often argued that we should hire the top candidates from the regional schools.” Still, he said “regional” as if it were an unclean word. “It's harder to be number one out of 400 hungry students at a regional law school than a middling Penn Law student. They work harder, less entitled.”

“Thank you.”

“You like doing immigration work?”

“Felt like being caught between an indifferent system that's never punished for dragging its feet and clients with unrealistic expectations.”

“I know about unrealistic client expectations.” The guy smiled oddly, like he was imagining a particular client. “Guess it’s the same in every field. So, you want to join us. What do you feel you’d like to do here? Corporate? Litigation?”

“I’m best in a courtroom. I’ve been a stand-up trial lawyer since graduating.”

The man’s engagement and excitement shifted as profound disappointment flashed briefly on his face. Leo had said the absolute wrong thing. “I see,” the partner said. “You’re probably used to smaller firms. Unfortunately, most of our work is paper. When we do go to trial, we make sure the client sees a partner in front of the judge. And, our associates are terrified of courtrooms. So maybe we’d make an exception, but you’d need to put in the time. Nobody pays our rates if they are going to risk putting a legal problem in the hands of a recent graduate. You could also scratch that itch through pro bono work.”

“So, Oren in Brooklyn Supreme, that wasn’t typical?”

“How did he do?”

Arturo imagined how Catarina might answer tactfully but truthfully. “He did his best given a jury that wasn’t prone towards like him.”

“Diplomatic. Good. I understand you won, didn’t you? In any event, we don’t usually take small personal injury cases. Often our fees alone would be more expensive than settling. I’m not familiar with how we ended up in that one, but I’d guess it was a minor matter for a big client, handled as a favor.”

“I see.” The ‘small’ personal injury case had resolved with a million-dollar verdict, his highest ever, making Russo LLP almost \$30,000 dollars.

“Arturo, I appreciate your trial instincts. But to open your eyes: Right now, the litigation game is to drown the other side with paper, then complaining to the court that they’re drowning us

in paper. Everyone's associates end up in warehouses of accordion files of junk they need to sift through until their eyes bleed in hopes they're too blind to recognize the smoking gun document."

"Of course," Arturo said, adjusting. "I'm here because I want to try something new."

"Good. You might find that contract negotiation is just as fierce a battle as the courtroom. Except after you close a deal everyone gets to go out and have steak together and everyone is happy, instead of everyone going home unhappy. Would you be open to that?"

"Very open."

The second partner Arturo met was Rory Kennedy, the guy with the ice rink in the basement for his daughter. Kennedy hung up the phone when Arturo came in, and said, "You're Oren's boy, right? Gave him a licking? We like that, that's good." He shook Arturo's hand macho-style, squeezing finger bones so they made a sound.

Then the partner sniffed, looking at Arturo's resume. "I like to look at the resumes during the interview, otherwise I get people confused." After silent nodding and reading, he met Arturo's eyes.

"Is that a four-in-hand knot?" he asked.

Arturo looked down at his tie. "Yes."

"Simple, classic. Everyone here uses half Windsors or maybe a full Windsor. I appreciate variety. And where do you get your suits done? I don't see three-pieces like that often."

"A childhood friend of mine became a tailor."

"Fascinating." Apparently, Arturo had given an unorthodox but acceptable response.

"Yeah. I came into some fabric and took it to him."

"Came into? You didn't rob anyone, did you?"

Arturo laughed, thrown off. "I repaired a bike. A legitimate barter."

Kennedy lost interest after no robbery was involved. “You’re reaching us at a dawn of a new age for law firms. Things aren’t like the salad days when businesses stuck with single law firm. You worked with the same in-house who came up with you, maybe your kids went to school together. The past decade, we’ve seen a mentality shift. There’s no more loyalty. Now Exxon gives its merger work to one shop, corporate housekeeping to another, and securities litigation to a third. Soon we’ll be in a beauty contest for every two-bit scrap of legal work. Amber & Morgan poached more clients from my book these past three years than everybody else in my first thirty. Keeping up means I need to demand more of my associates to keep up. You follow? No dead weight.”

“I follow,” Arturo said, not following.

“You ever hear the parable of the guys building the great temple? Someone sees the construction going on and says to one worker, what are you doing?” Arturo sensed he was getting an abbreviated version of a speech Kennedy had delivered many times in many first meetings. “I need someone who is interested in building cathedrals. That means not all the work is interesting or glamorous. But the economy must run, and to run she needs the holy marriage of entrepreneurship and capital. Everyone here is taught they’re special from a young age, and they don’t think they should be working on a Saturday night when they could be out at the disco. But I bet you can do this.”

The sound of the electronic shoeshine still reverberated in the back of Arturo’s mind as Kennedy spoke, the sound so faint he couldn’t tell if someone was using it again or if Arturo was imagining sounds. He focused on Kennedy. “Definitely.”

“You know that the idea of a poison pill didn’t even exist until Marty just came up with it in ‘75? Just made up something that the Delaware courts accepted within a year. Now, two years later, we all use it. Marty sensed it was something the Delaware courts were ready to swallow. Completely changed boards of directors’ defense strategies forever. Keep the raiders at bay.”

Arturo nodded, at a loss. He had no idea what a poison pill was, who Marty was, what area of the law they were discussing, or why Delaware law was important. He'd kept silent through several openings where Kennedy had paused, practically inviting an interruption.

“Who we want are people who can eventually design things like that while in the meantime—”

“Build the cathedral,” Arturo said, mirroring Kennedy’s inflection.

“Exactly.” Kennedy rolled his chair to nearby the window and looked out wistfully, grabbing a cigar from his desk. “You get it. He gets it. Say, you smoke?”

“Never started.”

“Good choice, not starting.” He looked at the cigarette hesitantly.

“I don’t mind at all. My wife smokes.”

“No ring?”

Arturo looked at his naked hand and forced a smile. “I forget it sometimes.”

“Huh. My wife would kill me.” Kennedy nodded with unfocused suspicion, “That’s good though; I find married men work harder. They know they’re not just working for themselves.” He lit his cigar and puffed smoke. “Well, no matter. Nobody of your generation appreciates good cigars. We used to have a summer event where we’d go to a cigar bar down on Water Street with associates. Had to cancel this year because nobody was interested, and optics. Instead, we went to amateur night at the Apollo.” He guffawed. Leo pictured a subway car of young white men in expensive suits heading uptown for a night mocking struggling black performers.

Arturo spoke half-thinking, “I’d love that, smoke some cigars, drink some whiskey, laugh at poor people.”

Kennedy coughed, and frowned. “We certainly don’t do that.”

“Sorry. It was a joke.”

“You thought I’d laugh? Or was this at my expense?”

“That we’d both laugh. Poking fun at a caricature of what other people think white shoe attorneys do.”

“You’re not one yet. You don’t see, but we’re at war right now—at war with corporate raiders who don’t give a lick about the common man, and we need soldiers ready for war. Hostile takeovers, leveraged buyouts of companies with one bad season: we’re all that is between them and these animals coming in. They fire half the staff and fuck everyone like zombies sucking out brains. If it doesn’t work, no worries. Resell the pieces, onto the next buyout. You could work a place thirty years and be out the day after a takeover happens. We defend the old ways. That’s what we do.”

“Sir, I understand. I grew up poor. I’m still not fully comfortable in a suit. Feels like I’m in a costume sometimes. But I learn fast.”

Kennedy squinted. “What now?”

“Cathedral-building, I learn fast.” Arturo repeating Kennedy’s favorite term seemed to calm him a bit, and he nodded slightly in acknowledgment.

The remaining interviews went fine, but Arturo’s thoughts kept replaying his joke during the Kennedy interview. Why had he made it? What might the consequence be? He’d let the lunch relax him too much, got the impression these guys were self-aware, and never imagined such powerful men to be so thin-skinned in response to ribbing. He was used to joking like this in professional settings and getting away with it—a perk of being a poor-person attorney was being able to mock anyone because everybody knew you were fighting the good fight for little money—but he’d entered a new culture and stumbled.

\* \* \*

A form letter was delivered on more typical, thin paper to the Spanish Harlem apartment with the next day's mail. Once Arturo heard the description of the letter, he had his duplicate open and read the rejection over the phone. It was terse, giving no reasons, saying only that they apologized for not having better news. His name was misspelled "Ant" instead of "Art."

"Selling out is hard," Leo said.

After the call ended, Arturo fell apart. The idea of getting this job providing a slim hope of a path back to Catarina had been keeping him together. This had been a miracle opportunity achieved through several stages of dumb luck: winning the case, his opponent being connected and easily impressed, and so forth. But even if he'd gotten the job, would it have won Catarina back? Likely not. He was grasping at straws, wanting to do something, anything to feel closer to a person who wasn't there.

Arturo fought an irrational impulse to call and tell Kennedy he needed this job to save his marriage, and hope over-sharing might appeal to the man's humanity. But even the fantasy sounded pathetic. These guys wanted hungry associates willing to give their life over to a job out of pride or competitiveness, not sad sacks delusional that money would make a woman return. Nobody there likely had good marriages.

Arturo's veins filled with icy anger towards Leo. When anger subsided, humiliation surfaced. Against common sense, seven years ago he'd given so much, believed in them so much, for a shot at true love, and it had worked! What deep satisfaction to follow your heart against what everyone is saying, and succeed? All that swept away in a single lunchtime conversation. Now, every day Catarina moved closer to Leo, and further from him. The lost love that linked them would dull until they receded to a place near where Catarina kept memories of Duncan. The next few years played out: hearing of milestones: job changes, children, health. News delivered by his own voice, in his own handwriting.

Arturo called Alice, confessing that Catarina had left him and he'd lost his immigration job.

“Come over,” she said. She was finger painting a mural for her next art showcase next week, and could use some help if he showed up with clothing that he didn't mind getting dirty. She sounded like she was living in an entirely different world from Spanish Harlem, Winthrop or any life he was currently living.

Arturo biked to her slowly. Instinct led him to stop off at a few shops before visiting Alice. He needed a gesture if he was going to show up in this state. He stopped at Tip Top Gifts, which sold Asian imports: pewter statues of dragons, wizards and swordsmen; leather goods; stuffed toys; and martial arts gear. He reached the edge of Prospect Park, biking alongside it and passing within sight of the bandshell where they met. He paused a few blocks east of Alice, at the Bartel-Pritchard Square entrance to Prospect Park. He looked over at the Sanders, Brooklyn's historic Moorish-style theater. The Sanders' lone auditorium could seat 1,500 movie-goers. Outside, the art-deco marquee read “New York, New York,” and below this, “Closing in February.” Arturo leaned his bike against the glass ticket booth. The booth's glass had several spiderweb-shaped cracks and a sizable triangle-shaped-opening covered with a fluttering plastic bag.

“Is the Sanders's shutting down permanently?” he asked the ticket lady, a teenager reading a textbook. “Or is that just the movie closing? Or New York itself?”

“The movie switches out next week, thank God. The theater is closing permanently in February. He won't even pay to repair the riot damage,” she said, gesturing to hole in the booth. She spoke with the eagerness of an extravert starved for conversation. “The city itself needs to make it for four more years so I can graduate college, but no promises.”

He gestured at the marquee above them again. “Was it so bad that it bankrupted the theater?” he asked.

She laughed. “The owner’s retiring to Florida, *but* they did just send us a new cut of *New York, New York* that was 20 minutes shorter because nobody would sit through the longer version.”

“I saw my first film here in the ‘50s.” He tapped on the ticket counter, and eyed a promotional poster for *Saturday Night Fever* the right of the booth. “Hey, you got any old posters lying around I could have as keepsake? All those vintage posters in the hallways? I’m about to visit someone who likes dance. *Singing in the Rain* or whatever. Or there was an *Alice in Wonderland* one?”

She looked back at the poster and then around the booth. “Not really. Someone usually takes them when a show closes, or we throw them out. I assume the owner will take the framed ones. I guess I could give you some old ticket stubs, or you’re welcome to come back in February and I’m sure he’d sell you anything cheap. Or . . .”—she leaned towards him conspiratorially—“really, just wait a few weeks after we close, and see if anything interesting is left behind. I promise you nobody will care about this place.”

From the movie theater, Arturo made one more stop for candies then biked the final six blocks to the building he’d helped Alice find years before. She was adjacent to the Prospect Expressway, the Robert Moses’ project that had demolished Arturo’s grandparents’ home and splitting a unified South Brooklyn community into isolated neighborhoods.

The wooden buildings on either side of Alice’s building had burned down, most likely for the insurance, singeing the stone of Alice’s building. Alice said she didn’t mind, since the burn marks made the building less of a target. Even so, some copper plumbing had been stolen during Alice’s early nights there, while she slept upstairs. Otherwise, she’d been left alone.

Out front, old sneakers dangled from a power-line and the building’s side alley was filled with unique junk: decaying rubber umbrellas, hundreds of keys, a broken boombox, and many, many dirty stuffed animals.

Alice's landlords were an old Italian couple, friends of Arturo's grandparents that had moved out long before the riots. They'd agreed to let Alice live indefinitely for cheap in exchange for making the place livable again and to prevent further dereliction or squatting. The police had busted drug dealers living there just before Alice moved in. At first, the only room that had been fully livable was 'the Vault' on the second floor, where the money and drugs had been protected by a heavy bolt lock. The third floor was storage, now a large studio where art was displayed during Alice's shows. Alice felt living spaces should have names, and in a nod to the building's recent history, this one was dubbed "the Crack House."

He gave her two large shopping bags full of bounty.

"What is it all?" she asked. She took them and slowly removed dandelions and gumdrops.

"For the kids in the Nutcracker. I couldn't remember what flowers they were meant to be," he said.

She smiled. "Any type works. Dandelions are perfect. I'm just glad you didn't get mice."

"Actually, there's stuffed mice at the bottom. I guessed the boys would want mice, the girls the flowers, and everybody the gumdrops."

"Oh, so there are! That's adorable. You'll spoil them."

Alice was wearing overalls with a white, skin-tight t-shirt underneath. They hugged without saying much. Then he helped her paint a mural, which was really just a colorful welcome sign. It was cheerful and bright in a way that felt anachronistic to his mood, the opposite of the law offices he'd visited the day before. As they painted, against his instincts, he unloaded everything since their impromptu lunch shortly after the duplication. As he did, he realized that he'd shared his feelings about the whole mess with almost no one. Sharing released an invisible weight that had been pressing on his mind.

“You poor thing,” she said when he finished. She wiped her hands on a rag and kissed his cheek. “You poor thing.” She met his eyes and didn’t let go.

If she’d only said it once and left out the kiss, he’d have left and gotten drunk at home. One more rejection on the pile was too suffocating to even consider. He’d suspected her attraction for years, a tension that linked them as friends but could have spilled over if he was single. Some distant part of him felt like a louse for testing her emotions so soon without even being clear what he could offer or what she wanted. He had no capacity for a new relationship. If she had any sense, she’d know that risk. This might be just an evening where her good friend was falling apart and needed human connection, and that could be okay.

He traced an invisible smile on the side of her arm, along where it would typically be drawn in ink beneath the two freckles. She shivered in response but didn’t move away, then moved closer, and looked at him with vulnerability. Emboldened, he touched the white of her shirt and squeezed her breast through it. This left a partial handprint from the red mural-paint.

The act felt like cheating, which heightened the thrill, but laced it with guilt.

Alice looked down at the evidence of his touch on her shirt. “I really care for you,” she said. She spoke with a powerful resonance that hinted she was barely able to say only ‘really care for’ and not ‘love’, to protect herself just a little.

He couldn’t back out then. He’d opened the door.

The next morning, he asked if he could return that evening. She said he could without a trace of hesitation.

## Chapter Two

After Catarina moved back in with Leo, she scheduled a day trip to see her mother. Facing Carmen felt less overwhelming with the deed done.

She took the train to Philadelphia, making her way on foot from 30<sup>th</sup> Street station. She hadn't walked Philadelphia's streets in years. Even during the holidays, they'd borrow Leonard's parents' car and head straight to Bella Vista in South Philly. Carmen had rented out the first floor of a three-story rowhouse on Washington Ave after leaving Catarina's father. She'd rented on the cheap as a placeholder apartment amid rumors the entire area would be demolished for an expressway, causing Italian-American neighbors to flee further south. The Italian families were replaced with Mexican and Vietnamese residents. The expressway never came and Carmen never left.

Early into the walk from the station, Catarina came across a man lying in an unnatural posture on the concrete, the back of his head leaned backward into the gutter, casting a shadow inside which seemed to be a bloodstain. Was he sleeping, injured or dead? There was no rise and fall of the chest, but his face grease suggested recent life. The unnatural looking position decided things. She tapped his chest.

The body shuddered to life, confused, then irritated, then—after seeing Catarina above him—smiling. The bloody shadow dissolved, just an illusion. “Hello, angel. Something for me?”

She gave him a little cash and moved on, the route dotted with a half dozen more sleeping men in the same shape or worse. Whatever New York was going through, Philly was not immune.

She stopped to gather some offerings at Venus Cosmetics & Beauty Supply. The store's faded “Dress Rich for Less” sign loomed on the brick above the entrance. It had been her family's preferred place to shop growing up. Carmen and Catarina's sister Gabby used to try out cosmetics while Catarina developed an eye for spotting a stray fashionable item among the discounted clothing

heaped in piles. As she walked around the store's black-and-white tile floor, the place's familiar cleaning fluid and old store funk triggered memories of a particular shopping trip with her grandmother during her childhood. The day before the trip, Catarina been bullied about her weight. Visiting this store, her grandmother bought her a then-fashionable turtleneck sweater. Within a week, the sweater had been stolen while drying out on the line. Catarina could now see the cheapness of all the store's offerings—though she still wore an inexpensive perfume she'd first discovered there during college.

She picked out her mother's preferred brands and left quickly.

Between the store and her mother's apartment, a group of teenagers loomed on the street. One boy with greased-back hair whistled. She'd tried to dress casually, but now felt flashy and conspicuous.

Carmen greeted Catarina in Spanish with an enthusiastic "hello, hello," and kisses on the cheek. They used Spanish unless Leonard was present. Carmen wore white gloves, though she didn't have the outfit to quite match the gloves' promise.

"Did you stock up on that perfume you like?" Carmen asked, placing the bags out of sight with understated swiftness.

"I found a place in Brooklyn that carries it," Catarina said. Her mother looked surprised, though Catarina had told her this several times.

The shag-carpeted living room was furnished with a black leather couch and glass-bamboo table. Both were gifts from Carmen's long-term employer, an Italian businessman. Other Italian items were mixed amongst the Mexican ones: laminated prayer cards, a Ferrari calendar, and a Frank Sinatra poster with fake signature. Family photos of Catarina and her sister at different ages lined the wall. The images stopped when Catarina turned 15, still pudgy and shy. Her younger self looked weighed down by small, distant burdens.

“I’ll make us tea,” Carmen said, “or would you prefer coffee?”

“Whatever you’re having,” Catarina said, sitting on the couch and taking a piece of Chewels gum from a bowl on the table. The sugary splash from the liquid center provided a nostalgic rush. Carmen had probably put them out knowing they were Catarina’s one-time favorite candy.

“Where’s that tea you like, I’ll need to ask Saint Christopher.” The sound of drawers open and shutting.

“Saint Anthony.”

“What?” Carmen asked from the kitchen. She was fully comfortable talking from separate rooms.

“Saint Christopher helps you travel. Saint Anthony helps you find things.”

“I’ll ask them both. Oh, here we go. So, how goes your big trial?”

“It’s fine. The other day I was at the Court of Appeals for my big case.” She said Court of Appeals in English, not knowing the Spanish term.

“Court of Appeals. Very good.” Her tentative tone revealed she’d no idea if this was actually very good.

“The highest court in New York.”

“*Very* good,” Carmen repeated more confidently.

“I thought of you because the person who was arguing for us was—”

“Why weren’t you arguing, if this is your big case?” Carmen poked her head into the living room. “Isn’t that your job?” she asked innocently, not accusingly.

“I wrote the argument. His job is standing up and making the argument in that particular court.”

“Shouldn’t you argue since you wrote it?”

“Doesn’t matter for the story. Anyway, you know what my colleague says when we’re leaving the courthouse? He gets this really serious look and says, ‘You know who you remind me of? Rita Moreno from *West Side Story*.’”

Carmen poked her head into the living room again and leaned against the doorframe. “Ah! You do look like Rita. I’ve always said. It’s in the cheeks and lips.”

“Mom, you’ve never said that in your life. When have you said that?”

“Ask your father. For weeks after we watched the movie, I kept saying it. He told me to shut up about it, I said it so much.”

Catarina shook her head skeptically but walked to the wall of family photos and looked hopefully for any resemblance. She still felt like an overweight woman hiding in a thin body, still braced for incoming taunts. Now, she tried to flip that feeling, and instead see movie star beauty in her 15-year-old body. Though hints of her future features peeked out from the grainy black-and-white photo, no Rita Moreno resemblance emerged. “Gabby was the pretty one,” Catarina said, deflated.

“You were both the pretty ones. Look at that beautiful girl,” Carmen said, standing beside Catarina. This delayed compliment evoked an uneasy warmth. Throughout childhood, her mother had never said things like this. Perhaps her mother saw the resemblance now that Catarina was thin, and assumed she saw it back then too.

“Even saying Joan Baez would have been better.” Catarina said skeptically. “At least she’s Mexican. Rita’s Puerto Rican!”

“So? You can’t look like a Puerto Rican? They all say I look like Audrey Hepburn. All your friend means is that you look beautiful.”

“I’d rather he not say it,” Catarina said with a laugh. “He’s not a friend. He’s a geezer and a co-worker. I expected him to say something nice about the case we just won. Instead, he mentions the one Hispanic actress he knows. I only brought it up because you love that movie.”

“Rita and that boy dancing. Reminds me of your father and I. His moves.” Carmen returned to the kitchen, gave a little hip shake while carrying the tea.

Catarina followed and absently explored while Carmen minded the tea. On the fridge were the same chipped fruit-shaped magnets from Catarina’s childhood, pinning more family photos and bills to be paid. A shot of her communion recalled simpler times when her life’s rhythms were dictated by the church calendar: Holy days, marriages, deaths, street festivals.

An inspection showed that Carmen’s diet still consisted of cold cuts and bread; pasta and cheese; pork, rice and beans. Beside the fridge was a stack of Phyllis Schlafly newsletters, a Microwave Cooking Guide and a dusty binder of Home Economics News bulletins full of appliance purchase tips and ignored recipes for Oriental Tuna Casserole, Beer Muffins and low-calorie Molded Crimson Salad (i.e., Jell-O). Carmen had subscribed to Home Economics at a time when she was still trying to impress guests. The freezer, as always, was full of Ring Dings. Carmen had a sweet-tooth—her name being one letter off from Carmel—that Catarina inherited but resisted.

Growing up, Carmen had been Catarina’s ideal of beauty. This image was reinforced constantly by family friends and strangers saying how perfect her mother and sister were. Carmen’s method of staying thin was to simply eat less. If the scale inched up, Carmen starved herself. She once gave up smoking on a doctor’s advice, then re-started within a month after complaining about weight gain.

When the tea finished, mother and daughter returned to the living room and sat on the couch in mirrored motions.

“Will you see your sister while you’re here?” Carmen asked pouring their tea, and the smell of hibiscus briefly competed with her perfume.

“I don’t have time,” Catarina said, sniffing her tea cup skeptically, not sure she wanted to drink something old enough to require a saint’s assistance to locate. A cautionary sip gave her a nostalgic rush. “I’m going back tonight.”

“You shouldn’t have come all this way just to visit me. I thought maybe your father already spilled the beans, but now I get to.”

“Spill what beans?” Catarina asked.

“I know Gabby wanted to tell you in person but she never sees you, you’re so busy with your important cases.” She leaned in and held Catarina’s hands, beaming and nodding. “Butterfly, your sister’s pregnant. Three months.”

Catarina let her mother’s hands go. “Pregnant. She’s just a child!”

“That ‘child’ is 24—older than when I had you.”

Catarina retrieved her mother’s hands and returned the beaming smile. “That’s so lovely. I’m so happy for her. What should I send her?”

Carmen waved this idea away. “Just visit soon and act surprised.”

“They’ve been paying for doctors?” Catarina and Leonard provided for various family members. Mostly this money had gone to siblings until a few years ago, when the wealthy Italian Carmen had spent her life assisting had died unexpectedly. Between the job loss and divorce from Catarina’s father, Carmen’s savings had thinned considerably. Helping Carmen was easier for Catarina when Gabby still lived with their mom; necessary items were slipped to Gabby and simply appeared around the house. With Gabby now living with her husband, Catarina needed to use a more direct approach.

“Medicaid will cover most of it. Her husband’s getting more work. God will provide the rest.” Catarina translated ‘God providing’ as Catarina and Leo pitching in.

“What about here? Do you need anything?” Catarina asked.

“Nothing,” Carmen said. “I’m sorry I just couldn’t keep that in about your sister. I do really want to hear about you. How is your husband? Are you still living on your own? You’ll never make a baby that way, you know.”

“No,” Catarina said distantly. “I’m back in Spanish Harlem.” Catarina felt whiplash; absorbing the news about Gabby made her less surefooted.

“With two men?”

“Arturo moved out when I moved in.”

Carmen weighed this, then nodded approvingly. “That’s truly fantastic. Then I’m so happy that’s resolved.” She took a sip of tea. “The remaining one, Leo, how is he doing?”

“Shook up. We both are. The last few weeks were difficult.”

“But he’s adjusting?”

“It’s hard to tell. Leo’s taking it, how do you say,”—she resorted to English—“‘stoically.’” Speaking in Spanish for so long exhausted part of Catarina’s brain, like an unexercised muscle.

“‘Stoically?’” her mother repeated in English, squinting.

Catarina resisted the urge to continue in English, which her mom was less comfortable using. “Accepting without complaint. He’s never really shown if things I do hurt him.”

Carmen nodded seriously. “And the other one, the one who left? He’s the same?”

“Maddie says he’s taking care of himself.”

“That’s as good an outcome as you can hope.”

“I miss him, but can’t really express that to the Leo who’s still there, because the emotions are all so raw. He said he felt like he was pardoned from the guillotine.”

“Doesn’t sound very ‘stoic.’”

“You know what I mean.”

“I don’t know what you mean. Maybe this will be a good thing. When I received your letter, I knew this was bad news. A price for that *thing*.” The affair.

“Don’t be superstitious!”

“Is it superstitious to believe what we do influences what happens? How could I not see some connection between the pain this is causing you and the pain you caused?”

“Mom, I don’t want to have this conversation.”

“I’m not saying something terrible: by getting rid of one, hopefully then all the malevolent spirits will follow the one you kicked out and then the one you keep will be clean. The two of you can happily focus on your future children, free of the past. That’s all I’m pray for.”

Catarina pushed her head in her palms and felt tears welling up. She regretted coming.

“Mom, I’m so happy for Gabby, but I don’t want to talk about babies. I had a second divorce last week. I can’t even mourn what I just did to Arturo, because he’s still there when I get home but in my heart there’s also a second one out there hurting, and I can’t do—” A lump constricted her throat.

“Oh butterfly, you’re so beautiful and so smart, and yet all you want to do is fret about a man’s feelings. He’ll be fine. He’ll go through the process of letting go, and yes, be sad for a little while. Soon some other woman—quite soon—will see the same thing you saw, and he’ll lick his wounds and get on with his life like the rest of us.”

“What about the vow I made to God? What’s it worth if you’ve broken it twice?”

“God is practical. You made a vow to one man and you’re only expected to keep it with one man; he won’t hold you accountable for two.”

Catarina stopped up the tears, then felt a flare of unfair jealousy at the prospect of a vague phantom woman comforting Arturo.

“You’re thinking of inviting him back?” Carmen asked.

“No. No. This just happened. I’m just emotional. Is that okay?” Catarina went to the bathroom to collect herself, remaining in there longer than necessary so she could be sure the crying had subsided. The bathroom tiles were cracking and rusted. She opened the bathroom’s small window to let fresh air in. Across the street was the same gang of kids who had whistled.

Carmen was reading a magazine when Catarina returned to the couch.

“All these stars without a lick of sense,” her mother said. “Have you seen Elizabeth Taylor’s hair?” She tilted a page toward Catarina, who barely glanced at it.

“Do you feel safe here?” Catarina asked. “The neighborhood feels like it’s changing.”

“Perfectly.” She kept flipping without looking up. “Nothing’s changed. You’ve just been away. Everyone here knows me; they don’t give me trouble. You really should come more often.”

“Mom, aren’t you ever afraid that some new kid will mistake you for someone wealthy, the way you dress?”

Carmen put down the magazine slowly, glared and tilted her head. “Might they mistake me?”

Catarina didn’t fully grasp how she’d offended. Carmen playacted the grand dame, but she couldn’t believe she was *actually* wealthy. Had her mother grown so sensitive that even alluding to her attempts to dress above her station hurt her feelings? “I only meant that you could be a target,” Catarina said.

“Ridiculous. This from the woman who brought me toiletries from a discount store? You can’t even afford to get yourself into a better neighborhood, and you’re going to get me there? And tell me, might someone mistake you for wealthy in your attorney clothes while you walk through Harlem?”

“Mom, no one is judging you. I just want you to feel safe. I’m young; and Leo escorts me if I’m ever nervous. He even biked me home from the courthouse after the riots.”

“He biked you?” Carmen laughed bitterly. “I feel perfectly safe here, thank you for your concern. But even if I felt unsafe, there’s nothing you can do about where I live. That was a selfish, stubborn decision you made a long time ago. Don’t come in here with airs of looking after your poor mother.”

“Do you know what Leo has given up for this family?”

“You remind me constantly, and I’m grateful. Leonard’s gestures are more meaningful than Duncan’s, but less helpful. And accepting help from Duncan was easier because Duncan wasn’t giving anything up that he needed.”

“So I should have stayed in a loveless marriage?”

“Most women would give their right arm for that sort of loveless marriage. You still loved Duncan when you left him, or else you wouldn’t have taken so long to decide. You loved two men and kept the one who you thought suited your needs more.”

“My needs?” Catarina said with a laugh. “You know how hard that was? The friends I lost?”

“Yes, your needs. You picked the one you thought wouldn’t sneak off at night so you wouldn’t have your pride wounded again. But now you’ll never be what you could have been.”

“We’ve done fine.”

“You were never meant to do fine. You were meant to be the best.”

Carmen wiped her mouth, went to the kitchen and poured a glass of wine for herself. Catarina waved away an offer, realizing her mother had probably snuck a first glass while Catarina was in the bathroom.

Carmen continued, “Marrying poor means you need to always be thinking about how do I pay the next bill, what is the fire I can put out tonight. You never get ahead. You never visit your

family. You don't have time for kids. You just talk about how tired you are. What happened to your dreams?" Carmen put her hand to her forehead dramatically, imitating Catarina's voice. "You call 'Mama, I'm tired, I'm thinking of moving back to the old neighborhood.' Like New York beat you. What, you want to come home and be like your younger sister. Another generation like this? No. You were the one who was supposed to change that. Want to help the poor? Let me make a call, I know so-and-so at Save the Children and, look, they're so grateful you donated, they're happy to use your brilliant legal mind. And you are so brilliant, so beautiful, you should be whatever you like. You deserve to be. Why? Why? You make it so hard for yourself when it doesn't need to be. You want to be a judge? If you're rich, you pick up the phone. So-and-so's friend hires judges."

"Mom that's not how the legal world works."

"That's how the entire world works since the beginning of time. Even in recessions, wealthy families find ways. A leg up. They always land okay. The Leos of the world, mmmh—only sometimes they land okay. Sometimes they can't send a car to pick you up because they only own a bike. Hmph."

"You don't have to tell me the world is unfair. But Leo's come a long way from not much, just like me. And I chose him because I wanted to do that with someone together, and I loved him, and none of that has changed."

"No! You chose Leonard because he always does what you ask without question. You dominate him. Always have. He can't deny you anything, and it's very sweet, but he has no spine when it comes to you, and you like that because you think he'll never cheat or lose interest. It's not healthy. Like Katharine Hepburn said, women should be loved, not worshipped."

Catarina was silent. She couldn't articulate her thoughts without over-sharing: Ardor seemed a fickle foundation for marriage compared with, say, shared goals or religious obligation. Passion

was unpredictable, unstable, and could evaporate abruptly. “No one pushes Leo around,” she said finally. “Can I have a cigarette?”

“You quit.”

“Talking to you like this makes me nervous, and being nervous makes me want to smoke. Why are we talking about ancient history? Fine, neither of us got an apartment overlooking Central Park.”

Her mom handed over the pack watchfully, and spoke more softly, rocking with inebriation. “Butterfly, I’m not trying to torture you. You know I love Leonard. I’m talking about what to do now to not make your life more of a mess. If he tries to come back, and he will, you need to be strong. This second one, he could have a malevolent spirit in him. He’ll ruin what you’ve built. The world looks for any reason to kick you to the curb. So you can’t let that one back in your apartment or your *bed*. I don’t know lawyers, but I know something about social climbing, and it can’t be done with two husbands. Please, listen to your mother.”

“It’s done. I told you. He’s not coming back.” Catarina exhaled smoke, then coughed. She’d taken a heavy drag that she could have handled when she smoked more.

“Fine then, you shouldn’t need a cigarette to calm you. It’s unwomanly.” She looked down her nose at Catarina with a vague challenge. Catarina was already halfway through her cigarette.

“You’re smoking right now!” Catarina asked.

“Behave as I say, not as I do,” Carmen said in English. This cliché evoked a nostalgic frustration. Countless times her mother had employed the phrase to cut off arguments, but now her tone was blended with an impish smile that admitted her open hypocrisy. “Pedro hated my smoking, my boss hated my smoking, and now they are both gone from my life, and I can smoke and drink in peace.”

“I don’t—” Catarina started, then cut herself off. She thought of the little hip shuffle Carmen had done coming in with the tea, as if a phantom of her father as a young man was with her. “You loved dad. You married dad because you were in love.” This came out like a surprised accusation. Though Catarina had long wondered why her parents stayed together as long as they did—she and Pedro had fought constantly until the later years, when they barely spoke—she’d never really considered why they originally married. Given that she’d never known them in a state of obvious love, the idea of ardor bringing them together was unexpectedly tragic.

Carmen spoke wearily. “Of course. Maybe I didn’t have anyone like Duncan James the III, but Pedro Flores was not the wealthiest man who proposed to me.” She had never mentioned other marriage proposals, and Catarina’s mind flipped through likely candidates to no avail. Something had always been odd about Carmen’s relationship with her longtime employer—some unhealthy entanglement—but he came much later. “To his credit, Pedro always knew who he was and who he wasn’t. We both thought the other would change.”

Pedro didn’t have much drive but he also didn’t have much opportunity with his rough English and lack of education. The gap between the wealth Carmen saw assisting a wealthy family and what Pedro could provide through odd jobs and manual labor felt insurmountable. “Why don’t I become a professional soccer player?” he’d ask bitterly. By contrast, when Catarina socialized with more elite crowds in law school, she slowly learned that most of her peers didn’t consider people like Carmen’s employer particularly wealthy or even American.

Catarina shifted on the couch, her mother’s honesty moving her, lowering her guard. “I know you don’t see it, Mom, but I chose Leo for his prospects too. He is ambitious, just not for the same things you value. Not money or social status.”

Carmen tutted. “What else?”

Catarina's instinctual responses felt foolish under her mother's waiting gaze. Giving up economic opportunity for something more abstract did feel like the height of entitlement. "A good balanced life. We're a team going through a recession that's everywhere. I was never half a team with Duncan. I was watching someone else play his game while I played mine. He might have helped me play, but he wasn't invested."

They fell into silence without moving from their places on the couch or looking at each other. Carmen picked up her magazine again and started flipping.

Catarina felt unexpected relief from everything they'd unloaded. It was almost time to leave. She allowed herself a little wine. It tasted flavorless and she put her glass down on the bamboo table and ignored it after a few sips. Her mind drifted to the train schedule and to calculating how she could leave without offending her mother further.

"I'm going to leave here a little early so I can catch Gabby," Catarina said. "I should let her give me the news and see if she needs anything."

"That's a splendid idea," Carmen said.

\* \* \*

On the train back to New York—after a brief visit to her sister where Catarina expertly feigned surprise at the pregnancy news—Catarina revisited the argument with her mother. They'd butted heads a few times in the past, but this fight had a new tenor that kept coming back to Carmen and Pedro, a marriage for love at the cost of wealth that had, in the end, provided Carmen with neither. If Catarina and Leo were happy, then she'd chosen well and if they were unhappy, she'd have the same fate as her mother. That Carmen had been happy enough to take the same risk at some stage was troubling.

Catarina admitted inwardly that if she had remained with Duncan years ago, she'd have far more options. In the beginning, when she'd loved Duncan with her full heart, there was nothing

wrong with accepting the easy life Duncan could offer. Children would have come sooner, and Catarina had wanted kids desperately, even then. (Even though she insisted it wasn't a pressing concern, Carmen had sensed this longing like a shark chasing blood in the water). Leaving would have been more complex if they'd had children.

Seeing a father with his son in another seat, she imagined Arturo with children. Sons playing with his tie and tickling his feet. She'd once witnessed Leonard helping a boy, actually a law student likely only a few years younger than him but very much green at lawyering, getting ready for a moot court argument. He paternally put the tie on himself first then did it backwards on the kid, and said with a familiar pat to the classmate's cheek "There, now you can just never undo the knot." How foolish! That memory did it. During the entire second half of the ride Arturo occupied Catarina's thoughts. Being away from her husband at length always pained her in a young, irrational way. She missed the very traits that left her feeling smothered when present. In this way, she was built for dissatisfaction.

As the Amtrak crossed into New York State, the weight of this meeting with her mother dissipated; the promises she'd just made to her mother felt distant, compartmentalized, trivial. In her fantasies, the rules of the world felt absurd and inapplicable. A compulsion to go straight to Luquer Street coursed like a drug in her blood. She let herself daydream about doing just that, of what might happen when she arrived, his hunger. She had more trouble focusing on Leo, who seemed comparatively abstract.

### Chapter Three

Arturo took Alice on their first formal date: a subway trip to Coney Island to see the Barren Brothers perform.

Arturo met Alice at her school around three o'clock on a Tuesday, as classes let out. They rode the Cyclone. They walked the beach full of tourists and locals selling mangos peeled to look like flowers. Kids ran towards, and then away, from the waves. Alice watched maternally, sucking in her breath when a kid did something even mildly dangerous. "No rough-housing," she said to a pack of pre-teens playing with a Frisbee after the smallest was knocked over. They sized her up and gave friendly waves.

On the boardwalk itself were bikers, fairies, and retro-hippie teenagers, just standing around idly, smoking and leaning.

"I'm excited to see the freakshow," Alice said, her arm linked proudly through his.

"Really?" he asked.

"My dad used to love these shows. The tattooed woman, the sword-swallowing." She stroked his arm.

A carnival barker encouraged Alice and Arturo to go in even though the freakshow was mid-performance. All around the entrance were loud cartoon drawings of classic freaks: Siamese twins, snake ladies, a man contorted like a pretzel being lifted by a muscleman. Arturo's mind went both to the style of the Barren Brothers' book cover and the *Post* headline blaring about the duplicate murder. The line was long but moved quickly, filling in as others left. From the chatter on the line, they were not the only ones drawn by the recent headlines.

Once inside, they were seated on some miniature bleachers in front of a small stage. On the stage a showman was driving a nail into his nose. Nail still in place, he introduced a sword-swallower named Sasha. She was heavily tattooed and muscular, leading off with acrobatics on a balance beam

and flirting with the crowd. That must have been difficult with no microphone and most of the audience in darkness, but Sasha was so sensual and suggestive with her words and her sword that he could hear changes in Alice's breathing.

Next came a series of basic magic acts: sawing a woman in half, some sleight of hand and tricks with circus hoops. Between acts, they whispered guesses about how each was done. Catarina would have countered his ideas with alternative theories and spot things he'd missed, while Alice behaved as if each of his guesses was the true explanation.

On his early dates with Catarina, he'd sometimes get caught up in her mid-sentence and kiss her without meaning to. He often needed a prompt to recall what they'd been discussing. He searched for this same urge with Alice but found none. He admired her reckless willingness to throw herself into his life, to house him and go all-in; he desired her fit dancer's body, and felt a possibility he could love her. But there was none of that desperation, no blanking out of all other thoughts.

When the Barren Brothers came on, the crowd became ecstatic. "You're looking at two men who have actually duplicated," the showman said, "ripped from the headlines!"

An audience member shouted, "Murder anyone lately?" The crowd laughed.

The two brothers did tricks to demonstrate they could read the other's mind, including taking random prompts from the audience and writing identical responses on sheets of paper. They told bawdy jokes, each ending punchlines for the other. Their mannerisms and inflections were exact mirrors.

The crowd grew restless as the brothers embarked on a lengthy joke about bank robbery. The brothers abruptly segued to their next bit: recreating the mirror scene from the Marx Brothers' *Duck Soup* by putting up an empty mirror frame and donning white bed caps and pajamas which they took off and replaced in time, dancing identically.

After these sight gags, they used each other as mirrors to shave with traditional straight razors—a performance the hype man emphasized only happened twice a week. As they shaved, they told no jokes and no music played. The crowd grew silent enough that Arturo could hear blade scrape against skin. The effect was mesmerizing.

After the mirror frame was removed and the brothers wiped their faces, the stagehands brought out a woman who claimed to be their sister whose own duplication failed halfway in. She walked with crutches and had two tiny extra legs that simply dangled from her skirt. It was grotesque enough that Alice asked Arturo to tell her when it was over. Arturo was close enough to see no prosthetic or gimmick was involved. The sister didn't speak at first and it was left unclear if she could. One of the brothers asked her for a song, and she sang an aria, her extra feet vibrating when she hit a crescendo.

The Barren Brothers' portion of the show ended with the room going fully dark and a projector showing a grainy silent black and white footage of their duplication. A single Barren briefly appeared unnaturally bloated and distorted before the split happened. Barren looked like he was screaming but the black and white and absence of audio blunted the realness of his agony. Arturo expected to have a heavy emotional response watching the tape but, though it seemed authentic, he could only watch with numb detachment. A violin played dramatically backstage, like an old cinema creature feature. The crowd applauded when the film was over, but the Barren Brothers were already gone, replaced by the handsome showman who demanded another round of applause.

The showman said, "We hope you enjoyed our show, oldest freakshow in the world, we make our living this way. If you missed the beginning, next show starts in fifteen minutes—make sure to step out and pay your fifteen cents again. Pay more if you want."

Arturo went up and asked to meet the Barren Brothers.

"Can't do that, buddy," the showman said.

“Please, I duplicated,” Arturo said, though he hadn’t planned to reveal this. “Here, I’ll give you a little money.”

“You a loony?” the showman asked.

“No, I—no.”

“You with him?” the showman asked Alice, who nodded. “Is he a loony?”

“No, I’ve met the other one and I knew him before and after.”

The showman nodded, rolled his jaw. “Yeah. Pretty girl like you wouldn’t be with a loony. Stay a second. I’ll ask if they wanna. No money for this.”

He disappeared briefly.

“Okay, you can come back, just you, not the girl. And only five minutes. These guys are on the clock.”

Alice said she’d wait outside.

Backstage was small, cramped, musty. Arturo had expected privacy but almost all the acts were there, along with some others he hadn’t seen. One Barren Brother was reapplying stage makeup to the other. They both were drinking unlabeled beers. They were heavily cologned and well-coifed, and frequently stole glances at their look in the mirror, a tic of vanity that seemed more indulgent with their double present. They had the manners of men who’d received permission to revel in narcissism.

“Here he is,” the showman said, giving Arturo a little pat of solidarity as he left. They both looked up at him.

“What’s your name?” one asked.

“Leonard,” he said. “Actually, Arturo.”

The Barren Brothers simultaneously raised their eyebrows. The only visible difference was that the seated one was more powdered.

“It changed after the split,” Arturo explained.

“Usually you guys come in twos,” the standing one said. “When you’re not fakes.”

“Sometimes even when you are,” the other added.

“He’s at work,” Arturo said.

The seated brother made a guttural sound. “Congratulations on not killing him. Yet.”

“Yes,” the other said, “and please don’t ever. One self-murder is good for business. But after two, the pitchforks come out.” Both were in heavy makeup to hide their age. Maybe seeing the other age made them more self-conscious.

“Tragic, though,” the seated one said like a reluctant admission. “What can we do you for, Arturo?”

“I just . . . I . . .” Arturo searched for a question to legitimize his visit.

“He’s kidding,” the other said. “Everyone comes for the same reason. To hear you’re not crazy. You’re not crazy. There, it’s done. You want a beer? We brew.”

“Sure,” he said.

They tossed him one from an icebox, a cork top that Arturo removed with a pop. The beer was cold and yeasty. “We would have been the Berlin Brothers if we hadn’t started when zee World Wars were still on people’s minds,” one said with a playfully thick German accent.

“Have there been many? Like us?” Arturo asked.

The seated one shrugged. “When we first started out it was one a year maybe, not every year. Then it comes in spurts. Late sixties had a boom.”

“Pets sometimes. A lady who swore her poodle duplicated but we’re pretty the poor beast was just pregnant.” He swirled his hand by his temple, indicating the lady was crazy. “Past few weeks we’ve had a bumper crop. You’re our third since the riots,” the standing one said.

“What did you think of the video?” the other asked.

“It was hard to watch,” Arturo said.

The seated one let out a sigh. “We can’t watch it, and we love watching ourselves. Were you awake?”

“No,” Arturo said. “I was having a nightmare.”

“That’s much better,” the seated one said.

“But the pain woke me up, and I felt most of it,” Arturo said.

“That’s much worse,” the standing one said.

“I have a wife,” Arturo said.

“The woman outside?”

“No, I . . . her, she’s just . . .” He became aware of everyone else in the room.

“We had a mother of our kid. Not a wife. That didn’t work out either. Sorry, but it’s probably for the best.”

Arturo had been taking a swig while this was being said, and he wasn’t sure which Barren Brother had spoken. How unnatural it must have been for Catarina, the effect of speaking to two Leonards. “Do you have a list, a network, of people this has happened to?”

The standing Barren Brother said, “Arturo, if that’s your real name, doth thou art wish you name on a public list?”

“I . . .” Arturo’s mind raced, trying to untangle what Catarina might think.

“That’s why there’s no list.” They switched who was in the makeup chair and the other began applying. “You have any useful skills, Arturo? You run a bakery or something?”

“Or happen to be rich?” the sitting brother said. “That’s an especially useful skill.”

“Not asking for us. We sometimes help the wayward split soul, and connect them to other split souls directly.”

“I’m not rich,” Arturo said, “but I’m a lawyer.”

“Lawyers are useful,” the sitting one said, his fading attention returning. “We had one but he disappeared, stopped returning out calls. His duplicate guesses he’s in Key West on a lengthy bender, unlikely to resurface. Can we call you if needed?”

“Absolutely. If nothing else I can steer them to someone trustworthy.”

“Our arrangement with the last guy was he’d charge some cases and do others for God, and outsource cases he couldn’t handle.”

They switched who was in the makeup chair and the other began applying. “Great. Leave your information on that pad. Sorry to rush you. But everyone here has to get ready for the next act. We can talk more if you stop by at closing.”

“No worries, thanks for seeing me.” Arturo started writing the Spanish Harlem number, then crossed it out realizing he didn’t live there. After some hesitation, he put down Alice’s followed by *(try first)* and then the Spanish Harlem number second.

“Take another beer on the way out, give it to your duplicate. But leave the empty. We reuse those.”

\* \* \*

As the train jerked its way back to her neighborhood in Brooklyn, he filled her in on the conversation with the Barren Brothers. Alice listened with her whole body.

When they stepped into her place in Park Slope, Alice gave out a great sigh. “It was so nice going on a proper date,” she said.

“It was,” he said.

When she flipped the light switch, a blinking neon-green light on the wall also went on and hummed for attention. It was from the most recent show and spelled out:

*Age of Aquarius*  
-  
*Age of Disillusionment*  
-

*Information Age*

She went over and unplugged it. “Not my favorite. I need to return this. So much to do.”

Then she collapsed into her couch in the corner as though she’d completed an arduous task, waiting for him to follow her, which he did, then kissed her.

“That’s so great that you can offer other duplicates something they really need. That’s what I keep telling my girlfriends, artsy guys are fun but their moaning about selling out to the man or whatever gets old. You get to really help people, and have the heart to do it.”

“So that’s why you’re interested in a square.”

“You’re hardly square. You’re you. A grown up. Artists are unpredictable, unreliable, boringly afraid of commitment and into themselves. They take you on sorta-dates to music shows. At some point a woman craves chivalry and stability.”

He squeezed her hand and they instinctually separated to opposite sides of the couch, looking at each other. Something tingled in him: he was now seen as playing the role that Duncan had with Catarina, except Arturo was far less wealthy. He had new insight into how Duncan, Catarina’s ex, perhaps once felt: the relationship security that someone depended on you for emotional and economic support. The idea of him as a stable provider seemed ludicrous; her expectations too low. “That’s a generous description given that I haven’t even found a new job yet,” he said. “I don’t have a place to live. I’m crashing someplace abandoned by my ex-wife’s secretary’s nephew.”

“That’s temporary,” Alice said confidently. “In fact, I’ve been thinking I don’t like you in that place. You should move here, bring your stuff. I feel safer having a man around, especially after those kids stole the copper wiring last year.”

“Oh?”

“I do have conditions, though, if you’re going to stay here.”

“Conditions?” Arturo smiled, not sure how serious to take her.

“If all you’re looking for was a little comfort in sex, now you’ve had that—and I understand. But if that’s what this is, we should end that part here and switch back to being friends. But I’m starting to get excited about you and I know how I am. You’ve seen how long I’ve been single—I put a lot of barriers around letting anyone date me. But when someone makes it around those, it’s like a switch and I get attached really fast.”

Arturo’s heart sank. “I appreciate you being forthright, but I don’t want to see you hurt. If I move in, we should think of it as ‘for now’. I’m a mess right now. I just got out of a marriage. I’m still heartbroken, Alice, and that means you should be careful with your heart.”

“Art, you think all my friends aren’t telling me that? To look after me? So you can justify being a jerk later? I don’t need you to tell me to be careful—how is that supposed to make me feel?” He tried reaching out to her wrist but she yanked away. “Why are we doing this?”

“We’re doing this because we both want this. But what I’m saying is that I can’t see into the future, because this is so fresh. I’m not ready to . . .”

She waited in silence. When he didn’t finish, she said, “Why come to me then? Why not go find some strange in the Village? I’m not asking for very much, just if we are doing this together, I need to know we’re trying something.”

“I wasn’t looking for a little comfort, I was . . .”

She waited again, and again he ran out of words.

“Whatever. Art, I’m going upstairs to take a shower, and if you’re still here when I come out, I’ll believe it’s because you want to be with me.” She turned to head up the stairs.

“Alice,” he said.

She turned expectantly from the staircase.

“Thanks for taking me in. I’m glad to be here with you.”

She nodded and disappeared up the stairs.

## Chapter Four

The crowds in front of the Manhattan courthouse returned for the Lucas Gonzalez trial. The blood lust in the air again felt palpable, with some signage depicting electric chairs clearly repurposed from the Son of Sam. New placards suggested xenophobia—denouncing Puerto Rican separatists and calling for the retention of “The American Canal in Panama.”

Catarina’s role as the tip of the spear against Lucas made her uncomfortable. The comparison of this boy to that serial killer and terrorists felt facile and uninformed. His parents had fled prosecution!

When she got inside, though, the trial itself was an anticlimactic affair. Lucas declined to testify, and the only disputed issue of fact was Gonzalez’s mental state when he committed the murder. No witnesses were called by either side beyond an expert to explain the phenomenon of duplication.

Catarina opened the trial with her theory of the case: Lucas had killed, with intent to kill, an autonomous human with a right to bodily integrity. That was the only thing the jury needed to remember. She took O’Donnell’s advice to keep things simple but left out any mention of machismo.

Shapiro was quite good in his defense. Earnest. He did his half-bowing thing to the jury when he finished his opening, thanking the jury profusely, and some members the jury smiled even though it was a high-profile murder trial. He claimed the defendant’s actions were in self-defense and without intent to kill, noting that Gonzalez was hungry, confused, terrified that if he didn’t act, he would be the one to die. Shapiro emphasized that Gonzalez gave no thought to what the other Gonzalez was thinking. In fact, Gonzalez had no time to formulate any thoughts at all. As expected, he painted Gonzalez as coming from a country where people showed up at night and killed you, and it was you or them. Didn’t we all have a right to defend ourselves in our homes? The only evidence

that came in to show the defendant's state of mind was his confession and diary entries written after the crime. In the entry, he expressed remorse and described going to the police with no fear of being caught. *My girlfriend left me. I rotted inside and she smelled it*, he wrote. *I couldn't get the smell off*. Shapiro emphasized that the young man had no criminal history.

As he walked from the courtroom, Lucas' demeanor changed, like a Catholic who had left confession with a weight lifted.

Within two hours, the verdict came down: manslaughter one, an act under extreme emotional distress.

At sentencing, the judge gave Lucas fifteen years, probation eligible after eight.

Catarina shook hands and smiled, spoke to the press and said justice was done. Her photo ended up in the rag papers.

Leo told her that he was proud, but without conviction.

In her relief, she called Arturo for the first time since the lunchtime conversation. Speaking to him, she felt full of glowing energy. In the end, they agreed to meet for drinks over the weekend.

\* \* \*

Catarina and Arturo met at Allen's Tavern, a basement dive bar in the East Village with a low tin-ceiling where the cigarette smoke collected thickly. They hadn't seen each other in a month, long enough for the heat spell to break and shift to fall weather. The bartender gave them thick glass mugs of light beer. They were both a bit overdressed, coming straight from their respective courthouses (him in Brooklyn, her in Manhattan). The crowd was a mix of more bohemian types, a few students, and union tradesmen.

Catarina wore a sheer linen, scoop-neck blouse and matching skirt. The top was ruffled, a tea-stain color that she hoped didn't look like a burlap sack. She liked the fragility of the outfit, which allowed her to both playact and feel vulnerability. She needed both as she set out to undo her

rejection. It seemed fitting to dress in a way that suggested, *I will be submissive to your whims tonight, if you take me back.*

She debated putting a gardenia in her hair, but that would give away her intentions. He would know she wanted him back immediately, and she couldn't assume he wanted the same thing. Even if he was amenable, she wanted to prolong the return to intimacy. She felt both certain that he'd come back after a month of separation but also insecure. Now that he'd been with a younger, more artsy bohemian type like Alice, he might have changed his mind entirely.

Coldness had come off him as they'd ordered their drinks and waited for them, but his eyes remained locked on her. She no longer needed the mustache to tell them apart: Arturo's hair was longer and he had a five o' clock shadow that Leo rarely permitted. His eyes told her they'd been apart for ages. She felt an expectant sensation in her fingertips; they anticipated touch. Her body was still programmed to expect sensations that might not come.

Catarina explained that Leo had told her about the near miss at Winthrop. She had then called Oren's wife, who Catarina knew from law school, and learned useful details. Oren's father was the COO of Sun Financial Markets, the company being sued in the lawsuit that Arturo had beaten him in. Everyone thought appearing in Brooklyn would be a great experience for Oren, and the lawsuit was a minor matter. Arturo hadn't known Oren was connected to a major Winthrop client.

"I wish you'd told me about the interview before it happened," Catarina said. "I could have helped you prepare."

"You asked me to give you space."

"Oh Arturo, this was different. Your future. I'm still your . . ." She faltered.

"My what? Friend?" He gave her sad eyes, perhaps because she'd said 'your future' instead of 'our future'. Perhaps he'd wanted to reach out. Perhaps she was being unfair, dangling exceptions after the fact.

“I still care for you very much, and will always love you regardless of what happens. And I wish I could have helped you with something like this. Maybe you did the right thing, not reaching out, and I shouldn’t have either.”

“I’m really glad you reached out, even if this doesn’t result in us reconciling. Just being here across from you is worth four of those jobs.”

“Only four?”

“Infinite of those jobs. I thought if I got that, maybe it would clear a way for us.”

He sounded like his younger self, wooing her away from her first husband, except with an edge of desperation—his least flattering state. She let his comments wash over without sinking in. That she could have helped him get a job seemed more tangible and immediately tragic, a parting gift she could have given him. “Sun Financial Markets is probably a big fish even for Winthrop Ashe. They’d probably interview someone unorthodox to keep the COO of a client like that happy.”

“I had no idea. Do you think the whole interview was a goodwill gesture to him? Like I was doomed?”

Part of her wanted to give him this, to let him believe he’d never had a chance, but she could never directly deceive him, only soften or avoid topics. “On the one hand, they’re really WASP-y and elitist. And they have that whole Winthrop system where they pretend that they never hire people except directly through schools. That’s not true, though. On the other hand, sounds like they sent you to some real rainmakers to interview with, which they definitely didn’t need to do.” She sipped her beer and shook her head. “Why did you say that terrible joke? Leo told me, ‘laugh at poor people?’ Sounds like the guy was on your side up until then.”

“Some part of me just couldn’t sell it.”

“Oh of course, you’re so pure, leave the rest of us to represent the scoundrels.”

“No. No. Nothing like that. I could learn to do the work and live with rich people in pissing contests with each other. The place just had an air. Like the best-case scenario if I’d gotten it was becoming a less impressive version of Duncan, working all the time but not seeing you.”

“You would never be like Duncan. And I know the deal with these firms. Isabel barely sees Oren, and when she does, he’s a zombie he’s so tired.”

“And I’m pretty sure Oren’s hitting the cocaine pretty hard.”

“I’m pretty sure they both are.” She squinted at him lovingly.

Something in her familiar squint broke his heart again. “Don’t look at me like that,” he said. “It’s not who we are right now.” He looked down to avoid seeing this hit.

She moved her hand away. He wasn’t sure when it had come close.

“The squint,” he said. “It just hurt more than I expected to see again.”

He wondered if coming would harm things with Alice. He pictured Alice in tears, him having just told her he was returning to Catarina. These imagined tears cut him. Catarina and Alice both cried often, but Catarina was a private crier, viewing tears as a moral failing; while Alice cried without shame, using tears to convey emotions she was uncomfortable expressing directly: anxiety, anger, or frustration.

Another part of Arturo still loved Catarina more than life itself, more than breathing. He searched for some way to convey this more deeply than gossiping about Oren and Isabel. Thinking of nothing sufficient, he smiled at her. He wanted to feel her skin—comforting contact more than sexual contact—even while he was unsure how much touch he could offer.

“So, you moved in with Alice. I didn’t think you’d move on so quickly,” she said, feeling an acute jealousy she knew she had no right to feel.

“*I’ve* moved on?” His eyes became knives. “You broke my heart.”

She looked at her drink; drank it, shamed. “Fair enough.”

Had he asked out other women first, and Alice was the one who'd said yes? Asking didn't feel right.

"So how is she messed up? Is she damaged?" Catarina asked. "Since you like that in a woman."

"She's not damaged. She's an open-minded creative type."

"Move back in," Catarina said. She hadn't planned to say this. She had no idea what response she wanted or how Leo would react—Leo had been relatively mute when she said she wanted to reach out—but studied everything Arturo was doing, from his knee jerking on the bar stool to his thumb on the beer glass.

"Are things different now from when you kicked me out?" he asked.

This pushback surprised her. She'd expected them to meet, drink a few drinks and decide together to undo her rash move a month ago. Her core fear was his improbably strong ardor for her might simply evaporate overnight—a fear that returned whenever he was emotionally withdrawn. Now that Arturo had been with a new woman, what if he told Leo how much he was missing out?

This wasn't that. His eyes were too pained. He wanted her to convince him that she'd found a solution, and that she'd tell work, tell her parents, tell the world, take every definitive step to be with a both of them. A roller coaster of emotions went through her that came to a stop when that offer didn't come out of her mouth. "Arturo," she said instead. "You're right, nothing's changed. That was a foolish, foolish request. Sticking with what we decided is much better. Friendship." She smiled then frowned.

"I didn't think you were going to reach out. I was trying to survive. Cat, I miss you. But there's no path forward that involves me moving back in with you and Leo. Tell me a plan where that doesn't end with us falling apart again, and then back in this pub months from now, catching up, promising to connect again soon—with the periods between visits getting longer each time."

“Tell me about Alice,” Catarina said. “She’s into married men?”

“You know she’s nothing like that. This is a unique situation.”

“Then what is her deal?”

He looked at her intensely, then released his gaze.

He told her that Alice had spent most of her early twenties in upstate New York with some naturalist commune that made crafts and grew vegetables. Her life became a series of local farmers markets, and afternoon circle massages that sometimes led to orgies, but other times led to napping. Women-only evening meetings were held where members spoke about reclaiming feminine sexuality, looking at vaginas in mirrors, naming them, figuring out how to give and get pleasure. The whole thing had a playful innocence. Alice left when her savings ran out and a few new guys joined that she didn’t feel as comfortable around, nothing terrible—she just sensed that part of her life was done. This background was vaguely familiar to Catarina, except for the salacious details of the commune—details that Arturo plainly wanted Catarina to know.

They stepped outside in front of the pub. Their ears rang from escaping the loud music inside and their clothes reeked of cigarettes—the combination of drinking, the smell and the stress of seeing Arturo again made her eyes dart around for someone to bum on from. Then, she focused on Arturo, realizing he was going to leave in a moment. Suddenly, she felt a panic that she might not have an excuse to see him again for a long time.

“Sounds like Alice led an adventurous life,” Catarina said, “You found yourself a good one. You deserve her, and I’m sure she’ll keep you happy.”

Without missing a beat, he flagged a stranger, asked for a cigarette for his wife. She smiled at him gratefully. The man handed one to Catarina, lit it for her, and they started together off for the subway.

“I was thinking about Joyce’s idea,” Arturo said as they walked. “Not any specific version, but just the idea that having two couples together makes everything easier, and we can all be around each other without people thinking thoughts. Maybe being friends that’s possible if we can get Alice comfortable. She admires you, maybe even is a little intimidated.”

“Perhaps I’ll reach out to her, see if she’d like to do lunch,” Catarina said, “as a start.”

“I’m sure she’d love hearing from you. Do you need her number?”

She nodded, and he wrote it down on a sheet of his address book, his hand a little shaky. It calmed her that they both had jitters. “Great,” she said.

“Then, maybe we can all hang out if that’s comfortable. The four of us. See how it goes.”

“I’ll talk to Leo,” Catarina said. “See if he’s comfortable.”

Arturo nodded. “I don’t know what he’ll think,” he confessed.

As she walked down into the uptown subway entrance and he crossed the street for the downtown entrance, a path seemed to form to keep both Leo and Arturo in her life in some form. A vague plan was crystalizing, though Catarina refused to let her mind fill in all the blanks.

## Chapter Five

When Alice returned Catarina's phone call, Alice's voice was calm and even, almost sleepy.

Even though some part of Catarina hoped her call would never be returned, her prosecutorial instinct was pleased that Alice responded quickly. In the prosecuting world, responsiveness meant the defense attorney knew they had no leverage to haggle.

Catarina and Alice agreed to meet for lunch the next day at Gage & Tollner in downtown Brooklyn, near the courthouses. Alice knew a waiter there who promised several orders missing from their bill.

That night Catarina had a hard talk with Leo, which she'd put off as long as she could. They talked around the idea of the four of them hanging out together, and hoped that Leo's link to Arturo would allow the conversation to remain somewhat indirect. Leo seemed relieved by Alice's inclusion in the formula, and said he'd defer to Catarina's judgment either way. An odd position for him, since he couldn't deny his attraction to Alice even though they'd never discussed the topic.

The windows of nearby shops were still cracked from the riots three months ago, or perhaps simple neighborhood dilapidation, but Gage & Tollner's storefront had either been spared or already fixed. In the plaza outside the courthouse, Koch was holding a mayoral rally, goading the crowd with shouts asking *How'm I doing?* He mentioned "law and order" three times between Catarina's emerging from the subway and reaching the restaurant.

The dining area was full of gas-lit chandeliers and ornate mirrors. Alice's cropped dusty-gold blonde hair glistened at a booth near the entrance.

"Alice?" Catarina said.

Alice waved her over, turning to catch the eye of the waiter she knew.

Contrasting sharply with Catarina's charcoal sleeveless blouse, Alice wore a rusted-sienna open-weave cardigan and rainbow fingerless gloves.

“Oh. Just coffee, for right now,” Alice said to her waiter-friend.

“I’ll have the same,” Catarina said.

“Oooph. Such strong air-conditioning, huh? Summer’s over,” Alice said to Catarina, adjusting her seat several times before settling in. “I should have warned you—they love keeping us cold in school too. Did you see that baby? How cute!” Alice waved at a baby by the door. The baby giggled and snorted.

“Cute,” Catarina agreed, looking at Alice, the baby and then her menu. Catarina was, in fact, uncomfortably chilly, and rubbed her arms. A thought flashed that Alice plotted this weather dynamic.

“Arturo said you might call.” Alice looked at Catarina full on for the first time and smiled. Catarina lost her breath. Alice was too pretty.

“You have beautiful lips,” Alice said. “They’re so full.”

Catarina’s fingers went to her lips. She gathered herself, fighting the urge to flee the restaurant. “Thank you,” she said. “I love your short hair. I could never pull that off.”

“Thanks. I read somewhere that Son-of-Sam targets long-haired women. But I was surprised how much I like it.” Alice tossed her bob cut a little.

Catarina hadn’t expected such a serious reason, but of course Alice was afraid like most young women right now. “I get it, crazy times,” Catarina said, suddenly aware of her own long hair.

“Let’s not talk about that business.”

Catarina nodded empathetically, then looked out the window for another topic. “Will you vote?” Catarina asked, gesturing to the rally outside. “I’m registered Republican, so I couldn’t vote in the primary.” Catarina was ready for Alice’s judgment, to explain that she’d only registered because it was important to her first husband’s family and never bothered to change it, but no judgment registered in Alice’s eyes in response. “I’m still not sure, but I’ll probably vote for Koch. A little

practical, he'll be better for the DA's office," Catarina added, "though if I voted with my heart, I do feel Cuomo has principles. He's anti-death penalty even if that's no longer the fashion, and a devout Catholicism which means something to me."

"Oh I can't vote at all—I'm still registered in New Mexico after all this time. While I was waiting, I listened to a Bella rally a bit over the summer, though. I love her voice, so distinct." Alice looked uncomfortable discussing politics. It even wasn't clear that she knew Bella had lost in the primary.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to put you on the spot. You must be wondering why I called. Can you keep a secret?"

"Of course, I'm your girl. Oh!" Alice put her hand to her mouth and breathed in sharply. "Are you pregnant?"

"No, nothing like that." Alice's enthusiasm was touching. Any fear that Arturo had poisoned Alice's impression of Catarina was alleviated. Catarina plowed forward. "This is about the duplication."

Alice leaned in and said a soft, conspiratorial voice, "I wasn't sure if we were going to talk about that. Arturo told me to keep quiet for now. I want you to know I would never have acted on any feelings under normal circumstances. You two were my Perfect Couple."

"Thank you for saying that. Has Arturo been well?"

She smiled and nodded. "He's been very sweet, very attentive. There's so much I wanted to ask you. He was a good husband, right?"

"I . . ." Catarina's mind briefly blanked at the word *was*. "He's a good man," Catarina said. "and husband." Catarina again considered fleeing—simply cutting off the conversation and leaving.

"Of course, of course," Alice said.

“Perhaps we can all get together soon. Go on a hike. Start seeing each other regularly so we all find ways to stay close.” Alice blushed, and Catarina recognized that Alice thought Catarina was asking them to be swingers. She also realized that this was what “remaining close” likely entailed. She touched her cross. Until then, her mind had only pictured the four of them doing those friendly things they’d long done: house gatherings, nature hikes, dinner, and of course all that would lead eventually in a particular direction. Having never asked anyone out, Catarina wondered if the anxiousness she felt was what men felt each time they put their heart out. She’d never considered how cruel her pauses before responding were.

In the silence, a new reflectiveness and intelligence gleamed in Alice’s eyes that Catarina had missed until then, like Alice saw straight through Catarina and was suspicious. “That makes sense,” Alice said finally, the warmth of her tone not fully matching her eyes. “No, this makes sense.”

“What makes sense?”

“I had an intuition that you’d eventually reach out. That everyone would miss each other. I know Arturo misses you.” When said by Alice, ‘Arturo’ as a name felt disconnected from the person who had recently been Catarina’s husband.

“I do miss him,” Catarina said.

“When I heard the two of you were meeting for drinks the other night, I wasn’t even sure he’d come back.” Alice looked down and hugged herself. “He seems so attentive to you. I don’t need to be someone who’s not the priority. I like to have all of someone, like you have.” Catarina met Alice’s eyes. She looked like a child who’d recently gotten something for Christmas that she wanted deeply but feared might be taken away. Having unexpectedly gotten Arturo, Alice would fight to keep him. Alice’s raw, naked love could be sufficient to whisk Arturo from Catarina’s life.

“Leo and I have no experience—nobody has experience with this. Two husbands all of the sudden—I love them both, but half of me isn’t sufficient.”

“You talked to Leo?”

“Of course,” Catarina said. “He’s on board.” In fact, he’d agreed with the idea of everyone meeting, understanding what meeting might lead to; though, his views of the plan’s wisdom were harder to read.

Alice brushed imaginary dust from the tabletop. “I don’t want to have my heart broken.”

“Nobody wants that.”

“My greatest concern,” Alice said, speaking slowly, “is with your history I wouldn’t be an equal part of everything. I want what you have. I wouldn’t want to be the one kicked to the curb if things get messy.”

“Of course, I wouldn’t want that either,” Catarina said, though she saw she’d unconsciously assumed her unique status in the new arrangement, with Alice having a subordinated right to Arturo’s affections and devotions. Catarina felt a little duplicitous. Alice’s hope was naïve, but Catarina decided to interpret her promise as meaning that they could run any arrangement as equals even if they weren’t equal in fact. Anyhow, Alice’s apparent attachment to Arturo seemed excessive, given how briefly they’d dated. Alice would rebound quickly if things went south.

Alice gripped the table corner in front of her. “Just a hike?” Alice asked softly, and Catarina knew Alice was on board. Catarina’s feeling of success was followed by a desire to slow, but not stop, the pace of whatever they were stepping towards.

Catarina smiled with a hint of flirtation. “Just a hike.”

Alice sniffed and shook her head. “They really cleaned this place up fast after the riots. Did you see it right after?” Alice asked.

“No, no,” Catarina said, tension relaxing inside. “I didn’t.”

“It was a mess.”

“Spanish Harlem is still awful. Leo and I went biking after the blackout, and it was just,” she swayed her head back and forth, “burned out building after burned out building. I don’t know how the City comes back.”

“It’ll come back. Like this place.” Alice’s eyes closed tightly, and she breathed in through her nose for a long moment, then exhaled slowly. When Alice’s eyes reopened, she was smiling, co-conspiratorial. “Yes,” Alice said. “A hike sounds great.”

\* \* \*

Catarina woke to salsa music blaring early Saturday morning. Their clothing smelled of bar smoke and she had a mild hangover. She and Leo had gone dancing the night before at a divey salsa place a few blocks south. Neither were brilliant dancers but they enjoyed going out and it provided some sense of normalcy.

As Catarina dressed with a soundtrack while Leo slept, a little thrill throbbed in her chest for the day ahead.

The derelict Harlem-125th Street train station had artifacts that hinted at an earlier era of glory: the homeless slept on beautiful wooden benches, near shattered gas lamps, above them a faded Greek tile mural on the ceiling. Graffiti covered everything. One of the station platforms had fallen out of use, and grassy weeds grew through pavement cracks and on rusted staircases, suggesting how easily the city might return to a state of nature.

On the still-functioning station platform, her two husbands discussed Arturo’s new bike. Arturo glanced at her. His love was still there—contained, boxed. Her instinct was to goad it out into the open again right then on the train platform.

“How was work?” Catarina asked Alice, who looked weary.

“Park Slope to Harlem took longer than I thought, I’m still a little frazzled,” Alice said. “The kids, I love them, but they were awful. They always have so much energy flowing through them when the school year starts. They’re used to playing.”

They got on the Conrail headed to Cold Springs, which traveled along the Hudson. The train itself was fancy, especially in comparison to the New York subway cars that were often shelled by graffiti. They got seats facing each other, and everyone piled their legs on top of each other like teenagers.

They fell into awkward silence. “Tell the story of the tailor. Your first day at the courthouse,” Catarina said to loosen them.

Leo and Arturo silently negotiated who would tell it, with Arturo taking the lead. “It’s not as much a story as a thing but, that day I got to the courthouse really early, all proud because I’m often late for things. And I notice there’s this refreshing wind blowing around my groin.”

“Oh no,” Alice said.

“Yeah, so I go to the court guard at the entrance and ask him if he knows any tailor within a few blocks and gestured down. He points me to a place two blocks away, in a basement. Had this a weathered, subtle storefront sign so good thing I asked the guard. The tailor is this old Italian guy. It’s more of a private house he’s working out of. I tell him my sob story about it being my first trial, and he’s just smiling.”

“He doesn’t speak English,” Catarina said.

“Barely any English, but grasps the situation completely, has me take my pants off, and goes to work on it with this old Singer machine, and he says, “Lasts one day. No sudden movements. One day only.’ He refused to take any money.”

“Did it last?” Alice asked.

“Exactly for one day. I didn’t make any sudden movements.”

As Arturo spoke, Alice's face lost its weariness, either enjoying the story or simply catching excitement from seeing him get excited. Catarina had heard the anecdote many times, had been its first audience. She anticipated the beats and couldn't help but laugh every time, even if the new audience didn't. Alice did, heartily—like someone laughs for a lover. This part hurt, that an old story of his was being employed to charm someone new.

After another pause, Leo and Arturo took out their books. Alice took out Jane Jacobs' *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*.

"That was one of Leo and P's favorite books," Catarina said conversationally. "In the sixties, Cuomo represented middle-class families suing to stop their homes from being bulldozed out in Queens."

"It's Arturo's copy," Alice said. "I'm not far in. So far, Jacobs seems great."

Catarina expected some further explanation, but soon Alice's eyes drifted back to the page. then she closed her eyes and leaned her head against the window pane. Again, Alice didn't seem comfortable when the topic turned to politics.

Catarina picked up a paper a commuter left behind—Jimmy Carter was standing on a demolished street, on an impromptu tour of a slum in the Bronx described in the article as a bombed-out warzone. Carter promised to turn around what could be salvaged.

Looking at her looking at the image, Arturo said, "Amazing that Carter comes to the Bronx and promises to help after looking at rubble and buildings burning, but then does nothing. Did you hear that the city put up fake decals to cover up broken windows of abandoned buildings? Potemkin village stuff."

"When you lived in the squats, were you ever afraid that the owner would burn it down for the insurance?" she asked.

Arturo looked pensive. “I don’t think there was an owner. Probably defaulted back to city property after being abandoned. But it was before law school, so I don’t remember if we even looked into it.”

“Huh.”

“We were worried about fires, though. While I was working for an electrician, I’d come home and see fire hazards throughout the building. My boss hooked us up with a retired building inspector, and he was quiet the whole inspection, then said ‘well, I wouldn’t live here.’ He gave us a list of like 20 things to look after or fix.”

“That is just so unthinkable to me.”

“That why you made me move. I don’t know, though. Most Americans live in old buildings that aren’t ideal if you look closely, but they never look closely and assume someone else knows what they’re doing is taking care of things. We at least looked, and took care of the most of the urgent items.”

“Uh huh, just *most of*?”

“I survived.”

She smiled and shook her head with a blend of awe and disapproval. “You’re just lucky I found you.” After she spoke, she became self-conscious that Leo was listening. Alice was probably too though her head didn’t stir against the window pane.

They fell back into silence, and Catarina watched the Hudson winding outside. When the train went through tunnels four Leonards appeared in the blackened window, which was somehow more disorienting still.

They exited at Cold Springs and were in the woods within minutes. They’d gotten a perfect fall day, with a cool breeze occasionally undercutting the 70-degree weather and the first leaves of the season turning color. Leo and Arturo had a spot they’d discovered with Dean, and returned to

annually in the lead up to their birthday. Alice found edible mushrooms—a foraging skill she'd learned from her father. She didn't get out of breath like Catarina had on her first hike with them. Back then, Catarina had hidden her struggles from Leonard. He'd also teased her for taking fancy shoes on a muddy hike, and now she erred on the side of practical and kept in better shape.

The boys led them uphill through the woods until they came to a cliff about 20 feet above a tributary near where it led into the Hudson River. The cliff was bare stone except for a tree near the edge. A rope dangled temptingly from a branch that overhung the water. The rocks were hot and bare except a shaded spot near where they'd emerged from the trail. They set up base there. A large bridge was in the distance, far down the Hudson, but otherwise the dangling rope was the only sign of humanity.

Leo put down his bag and charged for the cliff's edge, jumping straight off without using the rope, as Catarina predicted he would.

“The current's calm. Just don't go close to there,” Arturo instructed Alice, pointing to where the rivers merged.

When Leo returned a few minutes later, pants dripping, he pulled out a small cooler of Rheingold lager he'd kept hidden in his bag. He'd even included some ice.

“Cherish these, ladies,” Leo said. “The company just went out of business.”

He tossed one each to Catarina, then Alice. Even semi-chilled it was among the most satisfying beers she'd ever had.

Soon after, Arturo removed his shirt and went to the cliff edge, scooching up the tree to collect the rope. He turned to the other three. “Who's first?” he asked. Catarina raised her hand and put down her beer. She'd worn her bathing suit under her clothes but Alice changed unselfconsciously right there, not even turning her back.

The first jump was exhilarating, the brisk water washing sweat from hiking off Catarina's skin as it broke her fall. She let her body sink, then shot back up when her feet reached the riverbed. Arturo popped up a few feet away with a howl, and swam against the current to her. They hugged in shared excitement. As they made their way to the shore, the familiar slimy riverbed triggered memories of early visits, as did her feet collecting dirt and pulling at roots to make the scramble back up again.

As Catarina shook out her hair, Alice came up from her first jump, her body dripping in her two-piece, and squeezed water from one of the breast-pads, briefly and unself-consciously exposing a nipple. Catarina forced herself not to look at Leo.

Arturo and Leo did a few synchronized jumps, and the women sat as judges, providing approval to their egos—Leonard was often like this, proud of his body, but needing her smile. Catarina judged fairly but kindly.

Alice loved every leap. She said they should join the Olympics. The love in Alice's eyes was so obvious, so palpable, that Catarina felt foolish for not spotting it sooner.

\* \* \*

After they'd had their fill of jumping, swimming and climbing back up, the four of them collected by the edge of the shade and ate cheese and crackers.

“So, what was life like on a communal farm?” Catarina asked Alice, flipping her head upside down and shaking her hair with her fingers. “I've always been fascinated by people taking leaps like that but I don't think I would have been brave enough.”

“A lot of work. Honestly, we weren't the greatest at farming, since a lot of us had come from cities. But I loved it. I was in the best shape of my life. And you really got the sense of a dawn of a new era about what you could be. Openness to new things: men with long hair doing childcare,

women in jeans plowing the earth. The idea is that in the future feminine things and masculine things will blend. We're going through a transformation of what gender even is."

Alice moved her feet against Catarina's side, asking to be petted. Catarina touched them—they were smooth and warm from the sun. Leo didn't pause in massaging Catarina's neck.

"Huh," Catarina said, surprised at Alice's comment given how classically feminine Alice seemed, from her career to her clothing.

Arturo offered Alice another beer. "No, I'm fine," Alice said. "You all drink more than me." Arturo shrugged and opened one for himself.

"Funny," Catarina said, "how different eras can co-exist at once and be almost unaware of each other. Nothing you're describing has reached the District Attorney's office, which is still vintage masculine."

Leo questioned how much had truly changed even in progressive spaces. He suggested that modern women's desire for 'responsible, stable' men was coded language for what women throughout history had wanted: a successful provider.

Catarina admitted things with Duncan had been a modern upper-class spin on traditional roles. He earned, and she pursued idealistic interests. They had ordered meals most of the time and paid cleaning ladies. She'd felt strange delegating menial chores to other, poorer Chicanas and black women. Duncan had been raised by a nanny. If they'd stayed together, Catarina and Duncan may have done the same so that Catarina could focus on her career.

Alice asked how they'd balanced their dual legal careers.

Catarina rested her head on Leo, and glanced at Arturo. "I feel we're equal partners in crime. Leo's spent years filing immigration applications so that I can pursue my dreams."

Alice got excited. "Your dream was to be a prosecutor?"

Catarina paused. “I suppose not,” she said. Leo expressed surprise with a tight grip. “But I feel I’m helping give these kids a fair trial. Other prosecutors might weigh that responsibility differently. Like, they might not have had as much understanding of the world Lucas came from.”

“I wish people like my parents were less suspicious of working in positions like Cat’s,” Leo said. “Then you’d have more empathetic people in powerful positions.”

“Who cleans?” Alice asked. Alice must have seen Arturo’s messy habits by now.

“Me,” Catarina said. “I knew it right away. The first time I ate with the Galletti Brood, they sat around a small circular table and Dean put a cast iron pan full of eggs, peppers, rosemary and garlic in the center. And everyone wore these greasy wife-beaters, no napkins or towels. Poor Linda was so outnumbered.”

“What’s happening is she’s comparing our table manners to her first husband whose family stood every time a woman went to the bathroom. We weren’t wearing wife-beaters. You make us sound like a scene from *The Godfather*.”

“You were! You all talked with your hands like—” she gestured. “We have plenty of Italians in Philly mind you, so this wasn’t—”

“Arturo, back me up?”

“I remember the dinner like Leo,” Arturo said. “Maybe *one* of us had a wife-beater on. Probably Dean.”

“You can’t cite yourself,” Catarina said.

“Hold on. Arturo and I share one vote? So, we’re a matriarchy now? After the talk of equality?”

“Yes,” Catarina said. “You get one Art-Leo vote for everything.”

“You guys!” Alice said, biting down on her wet towel. Everyone turned to her. “Nothing. I just got excited. Go on, I just want to keep listening. Keep going. Ignore me.”

Catarina squeezed Alice's arm. "Anyway, they descended on the meal like animals, totally oblivious to how they looked. A hungry family where you were trained to go at it before it was gone, and I had to join in to get anything. I felt self-conscious, but liberated in a way. Then they all did the dishes without asking, insisting I sit and drink sambuca with his mom while the men cleaned. Leo was raised in an environment where they all cooked and did laundry. A long way of saying nobody cleaned the house, and they just got used to that. And now I do all the housecleaning." She gave Leo a reproachful shove.

"What Cat is really trying to tell you is that she doesn't cook," Leo said

"I cook. I made you vegetarian *enchiladas suizas* last month. You just love cooking so much, and you're so good at it." She pinched his cheek patronizingly.

"I know it's early, but in the future. I love making house, taking care of kids. I could take on that part—I like the idea of supporting a woman's career too. Helping Team Girl." Her open willingness to put her career second struck Catarina as almost subversive—leading Catarina to consider that perhaps Alice was disillusioned with New York's counterculture. Catarina imagined being pregnant, feeling the child kick—she didn't want to delegate homemaking or be a bad mother.

"The four of us raising kids together?" Catarina asked, stunned that Alice simply raised a topic that Leo and her danced around so delicately. "Wouldn't that confuse them? They'd be teased at school."

"Kids are adaptable," Arturo said. "They only know what they know, and can enjoy any childhood they've been given so long as it's in a loving environment—think about those street kids you paid to wash the block's abandoned cars. How they invented a game out of it, pretending to drive inside that rear-ended Studebaker while they soaped it up, like it was a big toy. That was normal to them, and they seemed happy."

Catarina nodded skeptically. "That was a nice moment, but this isn't really the same, is it?"

“While I was upstate on the commune, I had a mentor,” Alice said. “She and her partner raised two kids with another couple. I once watched the toddlers left for the park with the second couple, and no tears leaving my mentor behind. None of that agonizing over separation. Both kids saw all four parents as interchangeable.”

Leo responded with a slow noncommittal nod, and glanced at Catarina. Catarina smiled. Inside, a sharp internal voice said, *we’re not doing that*. She felt possessiveness of her abstract future child’s affections. Another voice rejoined: *Do I want my kid crying each time I leave? Is it so different from leaving a child with a close family member? Certainly, someone with a deep bond was preferable to a nanny. This could work*. “That’s very sweet,” Catarina said, “Thank you Alice, for getting us thinking about this. I mean it.”

Soon after, the air turned a little colder and an unspoken decision was made to head back.

As they walked, Alice said, “I also have a confession on a different, if we’re going to think of ourselves as a team. I’ve got a lot of debt.”

“How much is a lot?” Catarina asked.

“I’m not sure the exact number,” Alice confessed. “I had some health issues while I was upstate, and also some school loans left from college, but mostly the medical bills. I’m afraid to look.”

“That doesn’t change anything,” Arturo said right away.

As an awkward silence fell when Leo and Catarina added nothing, Arturo tried to mentally send the message to Leo to tread lightly.

“So you’re shanty Irish,” Leo said finally. “It’s okay. We don’t discriminate.” He spoke in a cavalier tone that Arturo understood as attempted humor but feared might come across to Alice as dismissive.

“Shanty Irish?” Alice asked, her voice shaky.

“He’s making bad joke,” Arturo cut in. “In the old days, you had your shanty Irish who were broke and your lace-curtain Irish who held airs. The punchline was neither was the good kind of Irish, because there wasn’t one. Old world bigotry.”

“Why would you say that then?” Alice asked Leo, confused.

Leo squinted his eyes in sheepish apology. “I was kidding. I’d have been shanty Italian if that existed, and she would have been shanty Mexican.”

Leo looked to Catarina. “We’ll all figure it out; it won’t get in the way of anything,” Catarina added, wanting to be non-committal but feeling that was impossible.

Alice looked relieved.

Arturo grabbed Leo by the shirt so that he stopped and let Alice and Catarina move ahead on the trail while Leo and Arturo held back.

“Hey man why are you talking to her like that?” Arturo asked. “She’s not Cat. She’s more sensitive. Read the room.”

“Sorry, sorry,” Leo said.

“I guess we really don’t have a telepathic link,” Arturo said. “Alice brought the topic up because a few days ago stumbled across the collection envelopes. She keeps them unopened in a rubber band in a kitchen drawer. We had a hard conversation about money. Wasn’t exactly a fight, just a lot of crying. She’s super sensitive yet too overwhelmed by to even open the envelopes to see how bad the damages are.”

Up ahead, the discussion had sent a rapid-fire series of emotions in Catarina: first, that Alice was a charlatan and this revealed her long game; this was followed by unexpected kinship, knowing the feeling of the weight of debt and how complex she felt when Duncan had paid Catarina’s bills

for school and rent. Still, the idea that Alice didn't know the specific number she owed, even ballpark, was a concept so foreign to her and Leonard's careful budgets.

Alice said to Catarina. "So strange how they can be so sensitive usually, then other times say the exact wrong thing."

"Welcome to my world," Catarina said. "Leo didn't mean anything by it."

"One way to save, I'd love it if you two considered moving into my place. It's so big, too big for me. You could just come by, check it out, then move in slowly. Whatever makes sense."

"Let's go a step at a time," Catarina said, focusing also on the roots in the dirt on the winding downhill in front of her. "Today was nice. I'm really looking forward to celebrating their birthday at your place. The big three-oh."

"You got my message about my plan? I think they'd really like that."

"Yes, I'm fascinated. And I'm in your hands."

## Chapter Six

When the duplicates' thirtieth birthday arrived, Catarina and Leo visited Arturo and Alice's Park Slope house.

Alice had made the entire building into a performance space that Catarina had been to a few times for shows. The main room had been gutted and replaced with a smooth wooden dance floor, which was currently bare other than a trunk. The walls were re-painted mustard yellow and covered with paintings, photos, tapestries, mirrors, all designed by friends. All around were Alice's light touches: A simple piece of straw around a cheap vase like a ribbon, a southwest throw hung beside the window, a flowered runner enlivening a dull table.

In the bathroom were scented candles beneath a cheap wooden Buddha surrounded by sand and an image of Georgia O'Keefe in her old age with a muscular young man on a motorcycle in Santa Fe, giving the camera a knowing smile. The print looked expensive, but inspection revealed marks of an oversized glossy magazine cutout.

The space was beautiful. Catarina hated it.

Leo and Arturo shared a friendly greeting. Arturo was unaware that Leo had come from an interview with Amber & Morgan LLP, a storied law firm comparable to Winthrop. He'd suffered no obvious stumbles. Catarina would have shared the news with Arturo but Leo's thought was to leave that conversation until necessary. Catarina had agreed given that Arturo seemed to have let that path go, and anyhow the idea of the two of them applying for the same open position could threaten the new peace.

Alice sauntered into her house after letting Catarina in, and stroked Leo's arm. Leo rarely let anyone but Catarina touch him, but Alice had always gotten away with it.

"Come upstairs with me, I want us to do something," Alice said to Catarina. The second floor had the Vault and a spare bedroom. The rest of the room was taken up by Alice's unmade bed,

an overflowing closet and a secretary with cubbies full of scrapbooks and tiny sculptures. Some familiar clothing of Arturo's had been left on the floor. So this was what happened when he lived with a woman who was comfortable with messiness. On the center of the secretary's main cubby, another familiar object in an unfamiliar place: the sculpture of two hands emerging from driftwood and reaching for each other.

"The Cathedral," Catarina said.

"Yeah," Alice said. "I love it."

Of all the art Alice owned, the hands were an odd choice for such a prime place—delicate and untrained. "It's lovely," Catarina said reflexively.

"I wish he'd make more, but he's so self-conscious." Alice smiled and put her hand near it without touching. "I have a surprise." Alice collected a small wooden box covered with carved elephants. She'd planned something for the boys' birthday. "Can I dress you?"

"I . . ." Catarina said. "Sure."

Alice examined Catarina like a tailor. "You're fuller and a little taller than me. Your bosom might present an issue, but I have some ideas."

First Alice held up a dress with a completely sheer lace panel on the side and shook her head, to Catarina's slight disappointment. Then Alice produced a wrap skirt with a purple southwest print, somehow between their styles. Alice dressed more sixties now than Catarina had dressed in the 1960's. Catarina's recent wardrobe was limited, her nicer clothing catering to the limitations of her workplace. Her casual clothing was jeans and blouses.

Alice added a wrap-tie top that revealed Catarina's back and collarbone, but no cleavage. "He loves your breasts so we're going to hide them, and make him see your lovely, smooth back."

Catarina blushed, wondering if Alice had guessed about her breasts, or if Arturo and Alice had talked. "Are we doing concessions to the male gaze here?" Catarina joked, instead of asking.

“Concessions? No, just a slight encouragement to unwrap you.” Alice took longest choosing bracelets, trying a charcoal leather one, then a Navajo, gold feathered bangle, and several others, before settling on a rigid wooden one. She placed a simple golden necklace around Catarina’s neck. “I love it,” Alice said, nodding approvingly. “I could never pull this off.” As the look emerged in the mirror, Catarina felt understood.

“He once said he likes me in a top with no bottom.”

“He has no idea what he likes you in,” Alice said, then looked at Catarina’s reflection. “I’ve a short tunic, that could do that, but I like this for tonight.”

Catarina nodded. She’d never had the sisterly intimacy of sharing clothing. Catarina had moved away to college before she could share with her younger sister. Then she was living with men from the day she moved in with Duncan. Now she was about to share her clothing and men.

Catarina retreated to her bag and collected her golden filigree earrings. “My great grandmother’s,” Catarina said. “Oaxacan.”

“Perfect,” Alice said. “You know, some friends back home have pushed me to be cautious about becoming too entangled with Arturo because they think I’m going to get hurt, and boy they’d find this strange. I don’t find it strange though.”

“Well, you can’t control who you love.”

“Oh, I think you can. I mean, not fully, but we all decide to open ourselves or not. I’ve always thought people hid behind how they can’t love someone because they don’t feel a tingle inside or baggage or ‘it’s too soon’, but that stuff doesn’t matter much. If my time upstate taught me anything, it’s that most of people’s hang-ups only have power because people let them. You let yourself be loved and fall in love, or you don’t.”

“Huh,” Catarina said. Something in all this implicated her and Leo both; they’d always absolved themselves from the affair slightly by saying they were overwhelmed by being in love, but how had they gotten there?

“You let yourself love Arturo?”

“Of course. And I can feel Arturo holding himself back right now because he’s scared, but he’ll get there when he’s ready.”

“Did you love Leonard before the split?”

Alice clutched Catarina’s hair in a way that felt like a tell. “No,” Alice said. “That’s exactly what I mean. I wouldn’t be open to stealing another woman’s man, would you? But there was always something about him that I’ve been drawn to for a long time, and love came quickly, felt organic when it arrived.”

Alice put on the earrings for Catarina and smoothed out her hair.

“Perfect,” Catarina said, mirroring Alice’s earlier inflection.

Alice picked up the mystery box with the elephants. “Ready?”

“I’ll add a little make up and come down in five,” Catarina said.

“Take your time.”

Catarina sat alone, feeling a thrill being in a house with her two husbands and a new lover; she was proving wrong everyone who’d found her square. Was the disapproving inner voice her conscience or her jealousy or her upbringing? In Alice’s circles, the stakes were different. Alice’s job might be endangered if the principal learned, but being a teacher or even a dancer wasn’t Alice’s ambition. Her dreams felt more domestic: a kind husband and good children. *Who am I?* Catarina mouthed slowly to her reflection, feeling the textures of the smooth blanket Alice had left her, lulling her into a stupor.

“Boys, come to the dance floor!” Alice shouted downstairs, bringing Catarina back to the moment. “The women have something for you.”

Catarina headed down. There, Leo and Arturo had been in the kitchen playing chess. She knew they regularly played word games, memory tests and chess with each other to gauge changes. They sometimes now had different responses to word prompts, but they were still even at chess. While playing, they had made four cups of jasmine tea, which they brought to the dance floor.

“You look good,” Arturo said softly, meeting Catarina’s eyes. Leo nodded. She nodded back, wanting more reaction after the effort but not knowing how to communicate this.

“Happy birthday,” Catarina whispered, burying any sign of being upset under a smile.

Alice took the blanket from Catarina’s arms and laid it out, and the four knelt in a circle with the teapot and elephant box in the center. Catarina felt the soft wool with her fingers.

“So, Leo, Arturo,” Alice said. “Inside this box is your birthday gift and something to help us remember our first night all under the same roof.” She opened the lid. Inside was a smaller, alligator-skinned case. Inside this was a mustard-colored device with a long plug. It looked like a hand-blender except at the tip, instead of something to stir, there was a thick rubber ring of unclear utility. After showing the device to Arturo and Leo, she lifted the instructions. The Norelco Massager’s instructions described how the rubber tip vibrated to relax the back and legs. The accompanying images were chaste, but Catarina got a general idea. Also in the box were rope, a blindfold, a small candle and matches, and rubber-banded index cards covered in Alice’s careful purple handwriting. Catarina took one. The card said, *Draw a bird on his arm while he removes your top*. She flipped the card around so Leo and Arturo could see, then gave Alice a questioning look. Catarina knew *something* like this was coming, based on their coded discussions during the hike, but this was bolder than anticipated.

“I made us a game,” Alice said. She stood and closed curtains. “And this game can only be played once: tonight. The rules are Catarina and I have to do the tasks on the cards while you two help. First task I’ll pair with Arturo, then we switch guys each task. Everything we need should be in the box. Everyone will be naked pretty fast, and we’ll need to play with ourselves as we’re walking to and from the trunk. You boys should do your best to distract us by playing with our bodies each time we’re nearby.”

“Wait, what?” Catarina looked around to make sure there was no other way for anybody to see into the building. “Hold on. Hold on. Let’s take a second. Let’s finish our tea.”

Alice smiled at Catarina, closed the final curtain, then returned to the circle and sipped her tea slowly, peering at Catarina above her cup. Catarina blushed. She felt jealous and scared and ashamed and aroused. She didn’t look at any of them but focused on the taste of her tea. Her senses heightened.

When the teacups were empty, Catarina nodded to Alice, indicating she could continue.

“Questions?” Alice asked.

“Can we kiss them?” Catarina asked.

Alice laughed, causing Catarina to blush further. “You can do whatever you like.”

“Can we add new cards?” Arturo asked.

“Hmm, I don’t know. Judge Cat, should they be able to write new cards? It is their birthday.”

“What, during the game? Oh, no. That won’t do. Actually, you know what—you boys can write new cards but only the other guy gets to use them. How is that?”

“Perfect,” Alice said. “Are we ready?”

“Wait. How does the game end? Do we win?” Catarina asked. “The group that gets through its cards?”

“Well,” Alice said. “It’s not really that kind of game. But I suppose you can say you’ve won when you come.”

“Oh,” Catarina said. She crossed her hands over her breasts, then looked from Leo to Arturo.

“Are we ready?”

Leo crawled over, uncrossed her arms one at a time, then kissed her. Catarina’s body tingled all over like a fever. She let him undress her but obediently left on her skirt, nylons and lace panties. She covered her breasts with one arm as he unclothed her, then crawled away, retrieved a pen from the trunk, then returned to him and drew a simple bird on his bicep.

Catarina’s next assigned task was to cover Arturo’s finger with honey and lick it off. As she licked, she watched Alice whispering in Leo’s ear, close but not touching.

The next card read *Everyone pins you, someone goes down on you*. This felt overwhelming, and she flipped to the next one: *Above the Waist Oil Massage*. Catarina oiled and massaged Leo around the neck and shoulders, letting him feel her breasts against his back and occasionally raking his chest but no kissing.

Catarina’s next card read: *Whisper something erotic in his ear and have him say something back while you stick out your tongue. Don’t let him touch you this round*. Though the words were in Alice’s voice, Catarina’s subconscious translated *something erotic* into *something whorish*, adding an immoral, shameful charge to the instructions. Catarina turned back to Arturo, cupped his fingers together and leaned into him. After a pause she unbottled: “Why are you making me into someone so dirty, huh? Do you like me like this? I want to see you fuck her while you watch me fuck him. Is that where this is going, do you like watching them together?” Her words felt artificial—more playacting as the fallen woman than being her. Catarina squeezed Arturo’s hair and made him briefly look at the others. A few feet away, Alice’s fingers scratched slowly across Leo’s back. Catarina said to Arturo, “Now you,

no touching.” She leaned back so he could see her, but still hid her nipples behind an arm. She stuck out her tongue.

“It hurt a little,” Arturo said, “when you suggested in Carrol Gardens that you didn’t feel you had a beautiful ass. It’s tragic to me for you to think this of something that gives me such pleasure—I want to take you in front of a mirror and make love and have you look at each and every part of your lovely body as I ravish it—I want you to see yourself through my eyes so that you don’t say foolish things about not liking your ass.”

She petted his face and met his eyes. She laughed at “ravish,” so silly a word, at how unpracticed he was talking like this. They were, together, used to doing pillow talk the other way, she dirty, and he earnest. His over-the-top attempt made her less self-conscious.

“I still remember,” he went on, “after the first time we fucked in your apartment and you had just a shirt on, no pants. You’d just stepped into the light and you scolded me for looking at you, and I remember desiring to have you right then, though we’d just finished making love. I remember you saying ‘oh Leonard’ your voice deeper, the first time I slipped into your ass.”

“Wow,” Catarina said. “I don’t think I can walk. My feet will be wobbly. I don’t think I can—”

“Look how vulnerable you are. I can feel and smell your warmth down there. I feel like my body has woken up after years sleeping, and all it wants to do is fuck you. I need you on your knees to quiet it down again—let it have its way with you, by letting me slip fingers in wherever I like. Say what you would normally only show me. Wake us up. I want your hunger to be fucked to make you helpless. Let me make you a good girl.”

She returned to the card stack, thinking she would find the one that talked about the group pinning her, getting them all together, but next card read: *Tell him ‘You can do whatever you want to me.’*

It was too enticing. She went to Leo. “Leonard,” she whispered, “You can do whatever you want to me.”

Leo pushed her down to the rug, hard, hiked up her skirt, and ripped off her nylons and new lace panties, all the while he struggled to get himself out of his pants. He was not smiling. A soft anger was in his eyes at how long he’d been made to wait. She was trembling. He freed himself and pinned Catarina’s arms over her head. He hesitated above her. She rolled her tongue around in her mouth to make it wet and warm for what might come next.

Leo released her arms, climbed higher on top of her, leaned over, grabbed her by the hair, and thrust into her mouth. She took him in fully, overwhelmed with his gift and throbbing between her legs in anticipation. When he removed himself, she fluttered around the tip where she knew he liked it.

With his left hand he pulled her head back away from his cock by her hair. He looked at her squarely in the eye and said, “Now, Cat, you’ll get what you’ve been waiting for.” She couldn’t stop shaking. Her whole body was doing it, as though she might come just from the weight of his gaze.

Leo smiled. Catarina looked over at Alice and Arturo, saw their bodies but couldn’t focus enough to make out what they were doing. Womanly rivalry and an admiration surfaced towards Alice for designing this experience, winning a decisive battle, ingratiating Arturo and Leo. Were the three of them missing something in Alice’s motives for being so open, a darkness or a long game? Simpler methods existed to pay off your debts, and Arturo didn’t have much money. Was it earthly possible that Alice really was this adaptable, to be comfortable joining such a fraught arrangement?

Leo’s hand wrapped around her neck, firmly but not uncomfortably. He leaned close and said, “Everything will be okay.” He kissed her again, hard, and then reached between her legs. His fingers danced around her lips. She got chills. He took one finger and ran it down the length of her body. It was wet, and he put it to her lips, then kissed her again. While he was kissing her deeply, he

started fingering her harder and faster, his erection pushed into her side hard and eager. He put the fingers that had just been inside her pussy into her mouth and moved his head down. He kissed her vagina—slowly at first, but then building into urgency, using the pattern she had taught him with his tongue. She ran her fingers through his hair and writhed underneath him in pleasure.

She tightened, screamed, and came hard and fast and long.

Leo's face was sweaty. He kissed her again, looked into her eyes, placed his hand on her throat again, and entered her. His cock inside her felt like coming home. He thrust and thrust inside her, and she wept with pleasure and love and felt she would be happy if she died like this. He came quickly. She could feel him pulsing inside her. He collapsed on her, lingering inside.

She exhaled heavily, then focused on her heart rate and breathing as they slowed back to normal. She'd never felt so physically or emotionally desired or wanted so fully. The feeling was heady, transgressive and urgent like those early days of their affair but heightened, deepened by years together. She played with his hair and whispered, "good boy, good boy," then bit his earlobe gently.

Across the room, Alice moaned.

The others' presence landed like a weight on Catarina's chest, and a suffocating fear passed through her. Her visceral response seemed a betrayal of the whole project, a sign that reuniting was ill-fated and naïve. The greatest intimacy only came while the other two had been blocked out.

With her head on Leo's sweaty chest, this visceral response faded and interest in watching surfaced. Alice was on top of Arturo, her hips grinding, and her body looked animalistic, unapologetic. Catarina's insides swirled with feelings of bittersweet happiness for Arturo, tinged with a feeling of self-loathing, and longing. Jealousy? A woman who enjoyed foursomes? Perhaps a relationship surviving through affairs and a partner splitting allowed them to understand love in a way that nobody else did.

Then, a satisfying future emerged in her thoughts. A contentment. She'd long loved both Leonard's ambitious and idealistic sides, but when she pushed him towards one aspect, he lost some of the other. This struggle in him led to his old immigration job, which existed in the frustrating liminal state between those points: his position wasn't prestigious enough to bring wealth or power, but he also wasn't meaningfully helping anyone enough to feel like he was fighting the good fight. Now she could instead push Leo towards his ambition and Arturo towards his idealism. She imagined Leo using the job at Amber & Morgan LLP to springboard into something remarkable in politics or business. Meanwhile, Alice and Arturo could keep them vibrant in a secret second life. The concept of marriage became blurry, the word itself shedding common traits as to structure and aim. The four of them were Mercury Astronauts, entering new orbits, exploring new galaxies. Why had she paired off with Leo towards the end? Was the pairing random? Next time she'd be more careful.

A dark cloud hit Arturo as his breathing return to normal. Catarina and Leo had finished on their own unexpectedly just as the game had gotten going. Even their brief reunion had been unfamiliar. Arturo couldn't anticipate Catarina's actions like when they were in full rhythm, lack of practice and his newer experiences with Alice interfering with their non-verbal cues. Catarina and Leo had maintained that wordless language that Arturo was forgetting. Witnessing them felt like watching an alternative life acted out in live theater, and then this whole evening seemed like another step toward a slow, unavoidable loss. More distance would follow, more feeling outside of intimacy. He'd be shut out from larger and larger parts of her life.

Flashes of the sex between Catarina and Leo replayed in Arturo's thoughts, overwhelming them in a way he couldn't stop. This reminded Arturo that Catarina was still fucking Leo several times a week—anger and jealousy flared, *his wife, the love of his life who completed him was in a bed with*

*another man as Arturo slept alone—no, not alone.* He glanced at Alice, and felt a neediness for her comfort and a fear that she might also abandon him. He'd woken up several times with the habituated assumption that the person sleeping under the sheets was Catarina, only for reality to return and him to feel a mix of resentment and gratefulness at Alice's presence.

## Chapter Seven

After Arturo and Leo's birthday events, the two couples got into the habit of spending most weekends together. Often this would be centered around an activity in Brooklyn. Once they visited Dean's apartment at the cold-water flat. Spontaneously, they brought up a plank of plywood resting outside so that Alice could tap-dance while Dean played *Sing, Sing, Sing* on the piano—a routine Alice had learned for her college talent show. After, Dean played Bach's "In Tears of Grief," clearly trying to impress Alice, won over by her appreciation of his music. Alice listened so intently that she closed her eyes as he played.

For Halloween, they all ended up at a growing food-cooperative in Alice's neighborhood. Leftists had banded together to buy in bulk from wholesalers, getting fresh, inexpensive groceries into the neighborhood using donated consumer fridges and one tiny freezer on the second floor of a community center. Only members could buy and every member did regular work-shifts, carrying groceries past each other up and down narrow steps. Alice joined when she moved to Brooklyn and introduced Arturo, who spent some shifts helping out with legal affairs.

Halloween weekend, the leftist community center that housed the co-op went bankrupt. They had missed several months of rent without the coop's knowledge, and would be evicted November 1. Thus, the coop needed to sign a direct lease with the landlord or shut down. The coop founders decided to think big and expand to the whole ground floor of the building and buy their first commercial fridges.

This led to a heady evening during which Catarina went through the coop's accounting books while dressed as Calavera Catrina with skull face-paint by Alice and an Oaxacan flower print dress for the costume party later. Meanwhile Arturo and Leo—dressed as skeletal minstrels—worked together sorting out the lease documents and needed permits. While they handled the

business, Alice sketched a bright mural outside that could announce the expansion: a woman in Victorian clothing biking on a penny-farthing in front of a Garden-of-Eden-esque field of produce bounty, announcing the coop's existence to the neighborhood. As they worked, a fire department next-door repeatedly blare its sirens, triggering flashbacks to the sirens the night of the riots.

After everything needed for November 1 was signed, they danced in costume at a local hippie group house, lighthearted into the night. This teamwork actually creating something was exhilarating. The arrangement worked; having the four of them together in bursts was less overwhelming than all the time; she could enjoy the attention and exploration, and retreat into the normalcy of her career during the week. The arrangement also allowed Catarina freedom to explore her latent bohemian side with three lovers who were inviting and nonjudgmental, and the controlled risk of exposure.

\* \* \*

Arturo answered a call from Leo on a Tuesday evening in mid-November.

Arturo and Alice were each in the living room where the orgy had occurred weeks before. He was reading. She was choreographing a new dance, the first two minutes of a disco song playing, the same snippet of disco being repeated on the vinyl record player repeatedly. Arturo pulled the phone into the kitchen.

As he and Leo did their typical greetings, Leo sounded exuberant but cautious. Arturo felt déjà vu that created a dread. He couldn't think of any reason Leo would possibly call and speak how he was speaking about mundane matters.

"What's the news?" Arturo asked.

"Apparently, the World Series happened and the Yankees won. Reggie Jackson hit three home runs off three consecutive first pitches."

Arturo was confused, and Leo paused while Arturo solved the puzzle. “You’re memorizing sports, so you went on a job interview? With who?”

“I accepted an offer to work at Amber & Morgan,” Leo said.

“Congratulations!” Arturo said. “Is that an immigration firm?”

“They represented New York when it was bankrupt. Sixty grand a year.” Pride slipped into Leo voice.

“How did you swing that?”

“Professor Martin got me the names of recent Fordham grads who placed at top firms. Amber & Morgan hired Allen Pierce, and I guess he’s a star mid-level. He pushed hard for me.”

“Allen? From the Urban Law Journal?”

“Him. Anyhow, they’re flush with bankruptcy work, and expanding into corporate takeovers and litigation, stuff the others white shoe firms don’t want to get their hands dirty doing. To do that, they hiring more kids from lower-tiered schools. The idea is that by 1980 or so they be able to offer one-stop outside-counsel shopping for corporations.”

“I hear you saying words, but can’t understand them. Are you using cocaine now too?”

His duplicate laughed. “I’m repeating their sales pitch. No cocaine. I’m also calling to see if you wanted our old immigration job.”

“You took my career move without asking.”

“You dropped the plan after Winthrop.”

Arturo shook the phone receiver then pounded the wall with the bottom of his fist, causing Alice to peak in from the kitchen with curiosity. He shook his head to indicate things were fine. He felt anger, but also pride that his job search could have worked if he had kept pushing. “You should have said something.”

“What would you have done differently if I’d told you? Sent a competing application?”

After a pause, Arturo ignored this and asked, “What did Catarina say? Is she having flashbacks to her and Duncan?”

“When I got the interview, we talked through how to be different from what happened with Duncan: we’d have better communication, more maturity. At the end of the day, we’re a different couple. A risk to stay where you are, a risk to try something new, right?”

“I’d have liked to have known you were applying. Maybe I’d have wanted to split the options.”

“They were the only place I got an interview. There was nothing to split, unless you wanted the old immigration job. They would take you.”

“I don’t want a consolation prize.”

“It’s not a consolation prize; it’s the job you had before the split. It hasn’t been that long.”

A tense silence followed.

“We still seeing you and Alice this weekend?” Leo asked. “Spanish Harlem this time?”

“I’ll talk to you later,” Arturo said, hanging up without answering the question. Leo’s tone had sounded so arrogantly confident Arturo needed to stop hearing it, but perhaps anything Leo said just then would.

Alice had remained standing there. She was sweaty, interrupting her choregraphing, disco music still playing in the background. “What was it?” she asked.

He explained the call. When he finished, he said, “I’m kind of a cagey motherfucker sometimes, huh?” Arturo asked, dazed. “And a little cocky and presumptuous.”

“No comment,” she said, smiling.

“How do you put up with me?”

“You have redeeming qualities. Honestly, I don’t know how the two of you have gotten along as well as you have.”

“He did punch me once, early on,” he said. She looked at him gravely. “Not too hard, and I deserved it,” he added.

“Well, I don’t like to think of you being violent,” she said. “but I’d hate living with myself. I’d always be eating all my favorite things, you know? Or you’d both wake up with the same outfit in mind each day.”

He nodded and she nodded, then she ducked into the living room to continue her routine. From there, she said, “We should have a celebration for him this weekend, and he can pay the bill!”

\* \* \*

Leo arrived at Amber & Morgan LLP with creeping existential dread. He’d been proud to get the job, but kept picturing Arturo’s description of the coked-out associates working endless hours.

The first morning was a makeshift orientation. The firm was downtown Manhattan, a little south of where Catarina worked. While doing paperwork, the HR woman gave him a two-thousand-dollar advance on his salary. She also gave him a customer care card good for a 5% discount at Brooks Brothers and Bloomingdales. She told him most new associates used their advance to freshen up their wardrobe, and joked how you could spot members of new associates because they’d all go out and buy the same suit or tie that was the season’s fashion. She advised him not to grab the first thing on the display rack.

He was told to take a long lunch, and used the time to go deposit the check immediately, nervous to be carrying so much and reacting to a nagging, irrational sense that that firm would change its mind and he would be called out as an imposter. Further underneath, he also had an air of invulnerability, he’d just stepped into the upper-class, he couldn’t suppress a smile. He found himself in front of the New York Stock Exchange, and on a whim went in. Everyone was all dressed smartly in expensive three-piece suits. Surprisingly, nobody stopped him as he made it to the bullpen

on the floor. He'd expected to be called out, but everybody ignored him. Looking down at his nice cufflinks and his bespoke interview suit, he blended enough to fake being one of them.

Around him, phones were ringing and the sound of ticker tape and beige IBM computers echoed. The experience was like being in the frontal lobe of capitalism's brain: the cutting edge of the dawning information age. The floor brokers were the short-term memory of the beast while the long-term memory resided in deep file drawers elsewhere in corporations, law firms and accounting offices across the world.

On his way back, he walked past lunching businessmen to where his former used car lot had been. In an auspicious sign, the lot was torn down and a half-built modern gothic office building was rising in its place.

When he returned to the law firm, he was sent to Abe Kirby, a man in his fifties with aging-cowboy good looks. His corner office overlooked the East River and the Brooklyn Bridge.

Abe congratulated Leo on being placed in the bankruptcy department, saying it was the most important department in the firm. He noted that every contract was at root about bankruptcy because most provisions didn't matter until a company failed. In the normal course of business, ongoing relationships trumped what was on the page. Nobody would fall on their sword over a blown deadline. But when the company is dissolving, that's when words like "tranches," "liens," "subordinated" and "unsecured" did their finest work.

Abe gave Leo his first assignment, explaining a complex financing arrangement for Leo to explain to a client. Then Abe called the client, introduced Leo as the associate handling the case, and let Leo explain the recommended plan as Abe listened silently.

After Leo parroted Abe's explanation, the client asked whether this was the best way to handle these situations in Leo's experience.

“In my experience, this is the only way to handle these situations,” Leo responded, overflowing with false confidence.

This earned a large grin from Abe, and Leo was rewarded with a number of accordion casefiles to familiarize himself with. Abe explained that going forward Leo would be the buffer between Abe and the client when the inevitable follow-ups came. Leo would determine which calls to pass along and how urgent they were.

As Abe collected casefiles, Leo took in Abe’s office. Hanging conspicuously was the short story *Only the Dead Know Brooklyn*—all six separated pages in one large frame, with Thomas Wolfe’s original signature under the title. Leo looked out the window, across the East River.

“I can almost see my childhood neighborhood,” Leo said a little wistfully.

“Where?” Abe asked.

“Park Slope.”

“Huh, I’m from Bay Ridge then, Brooklyn Heights now. People keep saying move to Manhattan, or Connecticut. I like being close to the ground. I take the Four Train, two stops.”

“Is that why Thomas Wolfe is on the wall?”

Abe got up and looked at the story. “Sort of,” he said. “You like that? I don’t know if they told you, but we spend some late nights here. Clients come in expecting the Grim Reaper. They sit where you’re sitting and they tell me that their company ending is the end of their lives. I’ll tell you, this job we do is one-part therapist, one-part businessman, and a little bit of lawyering.

“That story gives me a calm feeling during those long nights. Wolfe was writing in the thirties, and it’s still right today. Wolfe is saying that everything is impermanent. Each block has a million pieces, gears you don’t see. You get to know just a few stories, your own and a half dozen around you and those change pretty fast, before your train-ride from the place you just visited is done, right? Same with every business organization. From the owner’s story to the foot soldiers, the

engineer, the construction workers in the trenches. I've lived here my whole life – you believe it? My whole damn life.” He lit a cigarette. “And I'm still walking around my neighborhood like I just moved in. And if you can make your peace with that impermanence then you can see that your company ending is just a new story starting. Life doesn't end. Brooklyn is still there, right there.” He pointed across the river. “She doesn't even notice. I like to remind clients that companies are this way too. Everything is impermanent but also immortal. Life goes on. Companies are made up of people, and they go on. They change, start new companies.

“Each bankruptcy, or restructuring as we call it, is an opportunity. It's the origin story of this law firm. In '68, Allister Financials, our largest client, collapsed. Some people here thought the firm was dead in the water. Over a third of our business gone overnight. Wrong! First, we got to handle Allister's restructuring. Then, after the company was gone, their employees got new jobs. Smart people who knew us well dispersed to every nook of corporate America, and eventually they all needed lawyers. That one event diversified our portfolio more than any strategic plan ever could, eventually leading to your hiring.”

“Then I'll cheers to Allister's demise next time I have a drink,” Leo said, giving his winsome grin. Abe was seeing Wolfe's story through his own career. As much as bohemian artists and dockworker bars, Brooklyn's corporate arteries were another sub-world that Wolfe hinted at in his story—the halls where historic corporate decisions were made.

“Don't cheers too loud. Clients might hear.” Abe looked up like he was noticing Leo for the first time. “Something else I say to everyone when they start: any associate can issue-spot, but the ones who offered solutions were the most helpful. Once you've learned how to be helpful, you'll need to decide why you're here: For a career, or just passing through? Either way is fine with me. I'd just ask if a day comes when you want to move somewhere else, come to me and I'll help place you in-house with a client. The clients get a good employee, and eventually you can divert more deals to

us. We just poached half of Lehman Brothers' derivatives work from Winthrop Ashe through a midlevel I placed in '73. Call it enlightened self-interest."

He concluded the conversation by handing Leo the accordion files, and by saying "don't work too late on your first day."

The whole talk was oddly stirring: The idea of new opportunity from disruption, a previously singular unit spreading and reaching new heights. Catarina and Leonard becoming Cat and Leo and Art and Alice. Art could live a more bohemian idealism with Alice, and maybe that would allow Leo to let go of that part of him that was reluctant to succeed, lest it disrupt his connections to his roots, his idealism that said he should be fighting for immigrant rights, and his identity that felt wrapped up in economic struggle. Art could still do all that, keep him grounded, while Leo pushed his full will into becoming a member of the professional class. Simultaneously, jealousy hit and the plan seemed fraught. Was he going to end up working long hours so that the other three (Catarina and Arturo in particular) could share time? He'd finance adventures and comfort that he couldn't participate in or monitor. Resentment against his duplicate resurfaced that had originally appeared during the night Arturo shared with Catarina in Carrol Gardens. Leo had worked late that night at the immigration firm trying hard to keep his job.

Leo's office overlooked a Downtown Manhattan construction site. He sat with his first assignment, resolving to head home at a reasonable hour. He called Catarina, who asked how it was going.

"It's like entering the upper class," he said, recounting everything. "But, also, so many names to learn. My officemate still hasn't showed either."

"Oh, baby. Do your jaw and cheekbones hurt from forcing yourself to smile? I remember my first day, I had that. Being brought around to a sea of people."

She ended the conversation by encouraging him to stay a little later, perhaps 'til 8, in case they were taking note.

Leo's assigned officemate, Sonny, appeared around six p.m., as Leo prepared to leave. After a simple "hey," Sonny took a whole lobster out of a take-out sack and placed it on a Styrofoam plate. Leo watched as Sonny struggled to eat with plastic silverware as it stunk up the office.

"Lobster, on a Tuesday?" Leo finally asked.

"I know I'm only hurting myself with this fancy shit, but at least I feel like I'm sticking it to the Man."

"Am I the Man in this context?"

Sonny looked at Leo, bemused. "Of course not. I meant the client who has me working late. Sorry, I guess the smell is a little strong."

"You're billing that to the client? Is that legal?"

Sonny laughed. "Encouraged. Where are you coming from asking that sort of thing? They said I'd be bunking with a lateral."

"Capra & Cipriani."

"Never heard of it."

"Immigration firm in Brooklyn."

"No shit. Welcome to the big leagues, kid. Here's the perks: If you stay late, you can order dinner on the client. Stay later, you can take a taxi or car service home on the client. Everything is about keeping your butt in that seat."

"I've never been inside a taxi or taken car service. How do you do that?"

Sonny looked at Leo like an alien.

“The car service, your secretary can help you with. She stays on ‘til around ten or eleven depending. After that—”

“I have a secretary?”

“Shared with me and two other associates. But yes, you can tell your friends in Brooklyn that you have a secretary. Congratulations. Taxis you hail like a normal person.” He put his hand out. “Late night, they know we’re here and we tip well. They hover starting around eleven. Better fare than drunk girls out from a disco. Just give the receipt to your new secretary with a client number and your name written on the back. How’d your first day go?”

Leo told him about Abe, and his theory of how bankruptcy was at the core of the firm.

“Yeah, everybody sells that. That the firm wouldn’t eat but for their practice area. My boss in Mergers & Acquisitions claims the only thing CEOs care about even remotely is taking companies over, and being taken over, because they’re all megalomaniacs who weep when they see there are no more companies left to conquer. And, conveniently, their salary goes up every time they expand.”

“So basically, everything we hear about the corporate elite is true?”

“Depends what you’ve heard. Nobody’s evil. Just self-interested.”

“What’s the thing about this place new associates should ask but don’t?”

Sonny looked around suspiciously, then rolled his chair over and whispered. “Alright, first thing is you need to realize you didn’t hit the lottery so much as get a high-end dead-end job. Associate position lasts, at absolute longest, eight years then you need to become a partner, which odds are you won’t, or you got to find somewhere else to be. Let me give you a few rules for making it eight years. First, never calculate what your salary works out to on an hourly basis. The answer will crush you. Second, never think about how much the firm makes off of you. Here’s your hint: every six minutes your butt is in that seat, the firm makes \$100. If they could install a bathroom here, and get your wife to come over and blow you while you worked so you wouldn’t ever move, they would.

Last, never wait for someone to tell you to go home. They will take what you give until you're a bloodless corpse."

\* \* \*

As Leo adjusted to Amber & Morgan, the Barron Brothers called Arturo out of the blue. They asked him to go to a flophouse called the Haven along the Bowery to visit a duplicate named Victor who could use urgent legal help.

Arturo subways there after finishing a half day of work in Brooklyn. As he emerged from the train, a light rain was falling and the streets were empty. He passed by dive bars, music venues, and headshops hawking rolling paper, incense, leather jackets and band t-shirts. Walking ahead of him was a man wrapped in a drenched comforter that dragged on the sidewalk behind him like a cape.

Arturo reached the Haven and slipped past a pair of drinkers in the vestibule to the lobby. The lobby had the reeking smell of a dive bar, and indeed there was a third man drinking on the couch, half-watching a soundless black and white TV that hung from the ceiling.

Above the Haven's lobby couch a sign read *excuse our appearance during renovations*, though the disrepair looked more a result of dereliction than renovation.

The place had the air of a low-security prison—florescent lights and two long hallways that branched out from the lobby, each of which could be seen down from the elevated manager's booth. The booth itself was protected with glass and bars. Behind the glass was a TV remote with guts held in by electric tape, and handwritten notices reading:

*Rooms*  
*\$4 a night*  
*\$20 a week*  
*Advance payment required—No Exceptions*  
*Men only*  
*No visitors*  
*No violence*  
*No hot water.*

“Hi, Webb?” Arturo said to a weathered man behind the glass. The name *Webb* was written in felt on his coveralls.

Webb nodded without taking his eyes from men in the vestibule.

“I’m here to see Victor,” Arturo asked.

“Watch this.” Webb’s chin gestured at the day drinkers. “Jesus, they’re not sure if they’re talking or fighting.”

Arturo watched. The bigger man threw a punch, but it would either miss or landed too soft for it to do more than annoy the other, who swung back but then went back to holding out his wallet as if negotiating something.

“The bigger one is Red. He’s trying sell his man some baking soda as drugs, but his mark is yapping too long so maybe Red got the idea to rob his man instead of ripping him off, but *then* Red forgets he switched plans, and so goes back to making his pitch. They’ve been going on like this for ten minutes.”

“Should we break them up?”

“Not unless it gets hot. They’ll both be asleep in twenty minutes.” Webb focused on Arturo. “Victor. Victor. I don’t have a Victor right now.” He looked over a clipboard list on the wall. “You sure it’s Victor? He got a last name?”

“That’s the only name I was given.”

“You from social services?”

“Lawyer,” Arturo said, then added, “looking to help.”

“Don’t get many lawyers. We’ve got plenty of people with other names needing help if you’re not particular. This room here’s got a guy maybe you can help legally. He’s got wet cough that sounds like death, he swears it’s from chemicals they used in ‘Nam and he’s owed from Veterans.”

“Anyone here ever duplicated?”

“Sure have. Back in ‘66. Resulted in unpleasant howling and a releasing of the bowels that I had to clean. Never forget that.”

“Anyone recently?”

“No sir. That man left a few weeks after the incident. Couldn’t afford two rooms, I suppose.”

Arturo tapped his fingers a few times on the counter, feeling defeated.

“Maybe you could sue about all the trash outside? We haven’t had a pickup in a month. Worst it’s been since the strikes. I’ve written letters to Mayor Beame, but wouldn’t you know, he never writes back.”

“My wife actually prosecuted some guys after the sanitation strikes,” Arturo said. “Cops caught sanitation workers taking money from businesses along Park Avenue to clear out commercial waste while their colleagues were at the picket line. They signed private contracts and everything, then used their normal city trucks and uniforms to do the work.”

Webb whistled. “Sounds like New York. Though, you know, this guy from Cleveland, Bobby, he said that during their garbage strikes the mayor told folks to drop their trash right in their parks—so that by the end you had these mountains of filth that even the rats wouldn’t touch. I said to him, Bobby, that’s not a park, that’s a garbage dump! Suppose a city can always get worse.”

“I’ll mention your service gap to my wife,” Arturo said, ready to leave.

“Appreciated,” Webb said, nodding.

“Your man’s maybe looking for Don Vito,” the man drinking on the couch in the lobby said, seemingly moved by Arturo’s half-promise. “Real name is Victor. Saw him once with a kid who looked just like him, acting all jittery.”

“Oh yeah,” Webb said. “Don Vito, we call him. He came in here about two months ago saying his name was Vito Corleone. We all laughed. Think we shamed him into switching to

something else, maybe it was Victor? But, wouldn't you know, Don Vito stuck. If he split, must have been before he got here." Webb got out of the booth and locked it, pointing at the man on the couch then to the vestibule. "Make sure they don't get feisty." The man cheers-ed his drink in response.

Webb and Arturo walked down a long hall of cubicles. Empty ones revealed each to be the size of generous closet with a single light bulb, a window and a tiny bed. The walls were made of plywood and the ceiling was chicken coop wiring.

"In this room is a man who snores in two pitches. Someone once told me that only monks can train themselves to do two pitches at once." the manager said as they walked. "Can be troubling but better than the screamers."

"What's this kid like?"

"Don Vito? He's a good kid. Does his room up nice compared to most—books, posters and the like. But I think he might be . . ." he mimicked a needle shooting into his arm. They reached the end of the hall. "Don Vito, you've got company!" Webb knocked. "You up?"

"Who is it?" a voice asked.

"A lawyer."

A pause. "He can come in."

The manager nodded and took his leave. When Arturo opened the door, on the bed was a rail-thin man with his arm over his eyes and a Jesus cross over a stained white shirt. He was doing nothing, though multiple books and news articles were around him on the bed. Victor sat up, revealing his face: a teenager with shaggy hair and an aspirational mustache above thick lips. It was Lucas.

"Shit!" Arturo exclaimed.

"What?" Lucas asked, confused, looking around.

“How are you here? Your case . . .”

“Oh, that,” Lucas said, reaching for a box of cigarettes and lighting one. “Keep your voice down. Thin walls.”

“You escaped prison?” Arturo shout whispered.

“Barren Brothers said you split around the same time I did. That right?”

“That’s right.”

“They also told me your old lady kicked you out.”

Arturo sat at the leg of the bed, back to the wall, so he was looking up at the kid. “We’re not living together anymore.”

“Bummer. Mine left me too.” His English was essentially fluent. Abruptly, the kid burst into tears. “I fucked up. I fucked up badly.” Arturo stayed put, not wanting to engage in whatever promise of support comforting would imply. “There were three of us. The fight just . . . happened, it was dark, confusing. That pain had just happened and my left elbow hurt bad, I don’t know if the split did it or maybe the battle. Everyone was attacking each other. I saw his face before he died. I knew what he looked like.”

The tears made Arturo grudgingly care about the boy even as his mind raced to decide whether to leave, call the cops or learn more. “Why not come forward with the other Lucas?”

This question seemed to irritate Lucas, sobering the tears. “Man, fuck him. The plan was one of us would take the fall, and the other would get to live our life. We figured once he was convicted, I’d come into the open again. Things weren’t so bad while he out was on bail. He brought groceries, cash, news, whatever. We’d come across a little money during the blackout, but now that’s almost burned through. And I’m sick of living with these drug addicts and pathetic failures.”

The kid’s manner—how he held his cigarettes and his I-act-like-I-don’t-care-but-I-do air—suggested a deposed prince who hadn’t yet absorbed his new station. Catarina’s story about his

calling her accent guttural made more sense; he had, after all, been raised wealthy in Argentina before he had to flee. “How did you decide who would take the charge?” Arturo asked.

“We both killed him, but he struck the final blow. He was the one feeling really guilty, and we decided he’d take the fall and I could lay low until he went to prison, then I could resurface and step back into my normal life. They couldn’t get me because that would be double jeopardy. I didn’t count on all these appeals taking forever and I’m not sure when it’s safe.”

“Shapiro knows this?”

A suspicious look came into Lucas’s eyes, but also the relieved look of sharing heavy burdens. “Of course not, he’d turn me in.”

“Lucas, two people can be convicted of the same crime even if someone else is convicted first.”

“That’s not true. Double jeopardy,” Lucas repeated with fevered certainty.

Something clicked: Lucas was arrogant and perhaps even clever, but not particularly smart. He had polish from his upbringing that hid this weakness, and probably tutors that helped keep his grades up, some willful bluster, but he’d devised a bad plan.

“Lucas,” Arturo said. “Double jeopardy applies to situations where the same person is charged twice; the Court of Appeals already decided that when people split they became legally separate.”

“Man, you don’t know what you’re talking about,” Lucas said.

“If you didn’t strike the blow you might qualify for a shorter sentence, but as an immigration attorney I do know if you’re convicted of aggravated assault, then you also have deportation risk after release because you’re not a citizen.”

“Fuck that. Back to Argentina? That’s a death sentence. The junta hates my father.” He was struggling not to cry again, clearly clinging to his plan. “Dad didn’t want to complicate things. He

wanted to bury the body and forget it happened. Didn't want cops involved. We should have listened."

"Your father moved the body. Because you and your duplicate were too weak," Arturo said, holes in the confession falling into place. Lucas nodded. Why would the parents go along with this bad plan? Did he somehow only know about the duplication but not triplication? Presumably, a reasonable adult wouldn't sign onto Lucas's legal strategy. Before he formulated what question to ask first, another thought crashed in: *He's telling me everything because he thinks I represent him, and I'm acting like it.* Guilt cleaved through Arturo, and he lowered his head and put his hand up. "Stop. Stop talking. I'm an attorney, but not your attorney yet. You should save the details for an attorney who has already agreed to represent you."

Lucas's eyes narrowed further. "Who are you then, if you're not my attorney? What the fuck are you doing here?" His voice turned angry, but his volume stayed low. "That was the whole point. The Barren Brothers said you'd help." His body language clamped down, and a threat of imminent violence permeated the air.

"Stay calm. I thought I was meeting a Victor with immigration problems. I only know immigration law, not criminal law. They're very different things. Even if I can't help you, I might be able to get someone else you can trust, but I need time to think through your problems. You need criminal counsel, whether it's Shapiro or another legal aid attorney."

Lucas's face showed none of this was being absorbed, but he seemed a little placated. "I'm stuck. I'm so sick of being here but I'm stuck."

Arturo looked around the room, the kid's frailness; inhaled and exhaled heavily. "I don't know how Legal Aid works, if they can assign you someone different, but I can get you the number of other free criminal defense shops. I'm going to pick you up some groceries, okay? You think about what you want to do with this."

\* \* \*

When Arturo returned down the hall with some basics, he slipped a twenty-dollar bill at the bottom of the grocery bag. He half expected Lucas to have run out of fear of the cops, but the boy was still there, with a beaten-dog look. He sorted through the groceries, took Alice's number and the numbers of the Legal Aid attorneys.

\* \* \*

Arturo returned to Alice's place with his fingers tingling, entirely uncertain what to do. The whole story burst out of him as soon as he walked through the door. As he explained, he removed his tie and wet coat, collected a beer, and they retreated up to the bedroom that used to be a drug dealer's vault room.

"On the one hand," Arturo said after the explanation, sitting on their bed, "he's a felon in the wind, but on the other he only poked his head up to receive legal advice so turning him over feels wrong. What do you think?"

She shook her head. "That's your world. You'll do the right thing." This confidence felt both supportive and a little disappointing.

"I don't know the right thing," he said.

She nodded slowly.

"I'm touched that you care about him, but is this really our battle?" Alice asked.

"The kid needs help," Arturo said.

"Everyone needs help. I need help. Someone else can help him."

"I don't know that anyone will."

"If you get involved, Catarina is going to blame me somehow."

"That's absurd. Anyway, we shouldn't decide this based on Catarina's reaction." Inwardly, he knew keeping this from Catarina would have been impossible if he was still living with her, and he'd

be weighing her reaction. “I won’t get too involved. When he calls, I’ll send him to another immigration attorney. Just make sure he’s got someone.”

“Good,” she said.

“The kid seemed so lost. It wasn’t just Lucas. That whole place had an air to it. And all over the city, all over the world there’s places like that full of lost people who don’t make it out. You start poor, and you die poorer.”

“People make it out from poverty all the time. You made it out.”

“Not from conditions like that. There’s coming from a broke family, and there’s coming from the situations those people tonight came from.” He shook his head. “It’s weird, being used as an example of proof that hard work pays off, the American dream. There’s a temptation to say your experience proves anyone could do the same if they had enough talent. But that’s a comforting lie that requires overlooking some advantages I had.” He looked at the Rodin hands icon near the bed. “My parents were educated and loving even if they weren’t wealthy. Cat helped me navigate the law school process.” He closed his eyes, afraid what he’d say might make Alice admire him less. “And Augie made a call to someone he knew over there at Fordham Law admissions when I made the wait-list.”

“Did that call do anything?”

“I’ll never know. But Augie wouldn’t say he was calling someone if there was nobody to call.”

“But then you did great once you got there. Clearly, you deserved a seat.”

“A lot of poor people would do great if someone snuck them into a good law school. Rich people’s kids aren’t always that smart. About a third of my first-year class went out drinking the night before exams. That type is only there because their parents pressured them; and they know they have backup plans, third chances.”

Alice nodded. He examined her face for changes in how she viewed him.

“Are you disappointed that I accepted Augie’s help?” he asked.

“You did what you had to do,” she said. “I like it when you share about your life. I admire that you made it out, and know how hard it was regardless of what your family friend might have done.

“I don’t discuss my childhood often but my father has always been this great but failed musician. He could have been a real success, but he drinks. He’s why I don’t drink much. My biological mom, growing up, after the divorce she got depressed and began collecting junk. She didn’t wash the dishes, didn’t read the mail, shades drawn so the neighbors couldn’t see. There were narrow pathways carved amongst the piled-up shit in the house that my sister and I walked through, old fly-tape hanging from the ceiling, no air-conditioning. Our lawn was full of old toys, tchotchkes, and this old bathtub full of wood and rusted kitchenware. That was my childhood. The fridge was full of rotting shit, and we ate dinner on a towel on the floor every night my mom watched us. Either that or my dad coming home late drunk from these nightclub gigs where he was working for tips. It sucked. And nothing changed until the beginning of middle school when my father remarried and my stepmom moved in.”

“I only got into dancing and got to class at all because she took me and my sister’s needs on as best she could. She was an angel, but already had her hands full with dad.”

After she finished speaking, she shivered like she’d suddenly grown cold. He didn’t interrupt or say anything after, but kissed her and held her. Something about the intimacy of the revelation made sense even though it felt disconnected from what he had shared. They were suddenly in that intimate new stage of love where you bared what was beneath the skin. The request to be loved was thick within her words.

“Art, I want a family,” she said. “While I was living upstate, I realized that’s really important to me. And I don’t want to be an old mom.”

“I want kids too,” he said cautiously.

“Good. You have no idea how that topic scares boys off.”

“I’m not scared.”

“I’ve been thinking that I might want to move back to Santa Fe to be closer to my younger sister at some point. She’s still in that situation I described. She’s twenty-two, not a kid anymore, but still living with my step-mom and my dad, and dependent on them. I’m not talking about tomorrow, but maybe this time next year. If we’re still together then, I want to know you’ll be open to moving back with me if we don’t both find jobs we love or some other reason to stay.”

Arturo breathed in and out heavily.

Alice’s eyes grew concerned. “I’m not saying right away. We’ll have time to make something work in Brooklyn first.”

“It’s not that, Alice.”

“I’m not asking you to give up on Catarina. I’m not dumb, and in fact I see your situation clearer than you. If this arrangement works out with Catarina and Leo, they can join us and we’d have less baggage because we could come up with some story.” Her expression grew frustrated. “This is me being a lot more open-minded than most women—almost any other woman—would be in my situation. I’m not asking for a commitment now, just a possibility, you understand?”

He felt worn down—her requests were eminently fair. “You’re right,” he said. “If we don’t both find jobs we love, why are we staying?”

“Exactly,” she said. She kissed him fully.

Being Alice’s white knight felt welcoming, but also frightening given his divided heart.

\* \* \*

He didn't call Catarina that night, and Lucas didn't call Alice either.

He didn't see a path to even ask anyone questions about the situation without revealing Lucas's triplication, which Lucas had only revealed believing the confidences were protected by privilege.

On balance, Arturo went to bed having decided to sit on the information, and probably not get involved.

## Chapter Eight

In late fall, Catarina received notice that the indigent defendant courthouse manual she'd helped develop would receive a public service award at the annual ABA Hispanic Bar meeting. She was invited to take part in a morning of panel discussions followed by the award ceremony during lunch.

On the way to the subway, she paused to watch young boys play stickball in an overgrown vacant overgrown lot along 116th Street near their subway in Spanish Harlem. A circular stone with a cross on it served as the plate, and she wondered if they'd run after hit it. She recalled Janet Frame's short story "Prizes" in which the protagonist's professional laurels feel worthless next to those common girls in her hometown with their prizes in their strollers. After a successful hit, the batter did not run, but rather opened a debate of how many bases the hit was worth. The back fence was a triple under their local rules and it didn't reach, but batter insisted it would have if a neighbor's laundry line hadn't interrupted the ball's flight. America's future lawyers in training.

The Hispanic Bar event was hosted by the Manhattan Bar Association building, a place that felt between a hunting lodge or retreat cabin.

Catarina moderated a panel for female law students on career avenues. The panel consisted of Maddie; a family law practitioner; a judge; and Esperanza "Nadia" Gomez, a Latina civil-rights icon who currently represented the United Farmworker Lawyers' Guild. About twenty female law students and recent graduates filled the room. Catarina found it encouraging, a sea of boxy suits with padded shoulders and demure skirts contrasting with the mahogany and granite of the ornate space. It was as if the women were preparing to take over an old boy's club.

Nadia Gomez went first. She was a gray-haired, frail woman. She wore no makeup, no smile, and no artifice. Her accent evoked Catarina's grandmother way of speaking.

Nadia passed around two laminated old newspaper articles. The first was about the 1971 occupation of Alcatraz for Native American rights. She lifted a laminated San Francisco Chronicle newspaper clipping that showed Nadia and others in a mix of traditional and modern garb, proudly standing in front of a graffitied street sign that read 'Indian Property.' A second laminated paper was a large headline about the Delano Grape Strike.

"First, the good parts." Nadia laughed as if this were an obvious joke and lit a cigarette, and told a story about working with Cesar Chavez, who she simply called *Cesar*. Then, she talked about her organization. Farmworker defense and wage claims were only the beachhead. Their small, fifteen attorney organization was involved in education law, voting rights, and social-justice impact litigation.

Nadia nodded slightly. "Now, our funding if anyone is considering applying," Nadia said. "We got a little seed money to fund three new positions, I don't even remember the group's name, shamefully. The Mead Foundation? They'll fund the job until 1980. After that, I can't promise. I can show you the pay. The top line is my salary, so you know I'm not cheating you. The bottom line would be the starting salary." Nadia wrote two figures on the blackboard. The top figure was uncomfortably close to Catarina's current salary and the bottom figure was only slightly less. *That's shameful.* Catarina thought. *The DA's office barely pays its seasoned attorneys better than non-profits. How can I recruit anyone to be prosecutors? Hell, why am I prosecuting when I could be doing that? Now that Leo was making more, perhaps I should be doing something idealistic.* Catarina instinctually shielded her feelings from the crowd with a thick smile.

"Okay, for those of you who are still with me," Nadia said, "find me in the hall before I leave. I'll give you my card and I'll see what I can do. Young women like you all are our lifeblood."

Maddie went next. She told a "prosecutor's war story" about a poor black man who brought a lawsuit claiming a police officer had used excessive force. The man claimed that he'd been trying

to take a piss on the side of a car when the incident happened, rather than trying to steal hubcaps. His story was oddly compelling and credible, particularly since the offending officer was an Irishman with an on-edge break-your-face-on-whim vibe. Maddie's defense of the officer looked doomed, until the officer's partner backed the story how the man belligerently resisted arrest; the partner was also Irish, but a large red-bearded teddy-bear of a man.

Maddie brought the story around to being a progressive woman having to defend for the on-edge cop. Often, Maddie said, both sides in a case were lying, or at least coming from a biased viewpoint, and there are facts that simply don't add up for either side. The truth becomes something for the jury to sort through. She'd made sure the process was as fair as possible, not allowing the jury to learn that the guy accusing the officer was currently in prison for an unrelated crime by letting him hide his shackles under the defense table.

Catarina had worked through the presentation with Maddie beforehand, and bent Maddie's conclusion towards Catarina's own prosecutorial philosophy. Listening to Maddie in front of a civil rights icon, her views sounded defensive.

The audience acted nervous during the Q and A. Their questions stemmed from how uncertain their futures were and the kinds of jobs available beyond the government and nonprofits. Someone asked how having children would affect her career, but none of the women on the panel had children, except the old judge. This felt like a rough sort of answer in itself. Nadia also noted the ethical dilemma of bringing more children into the world when civilization itself felt like it was unravelling. Catarina answered surprisingly frankly, sharing that she wanted children but had never felt settled enough in her career to feel comfortable having them. How would she balance work with childcare? They couldn't afford a nanny. She didn't want to compromise her care. Alice's offer to handle caretaking would be a better option, even if the idea felt threatening. She daydreamed what

that might look like until the panel ended. Immediately, Nadia was mobbed for her card while nobody came up to Catarina or Maddie with anything but a polite thanks.

Eventually, the attendees all shuffled to the dining hall and went to assigned seats. Catarina, Nadia, and other distinguished guests were assigned a table near the speaker's platform. Before the lunch was served, various people were thanked and awarded, and next year's board for the Hispanic Bar was announced.

Copies of the *Prisoners' Rights Handbook* were distributed at the entrance. The book was cheaply made, bound with round plastic rings rather than proper glue, and had the look of a photocopied vacuum manual, but each copy felt holy in Catarina's hands.

When the host called Catarina, she walked to the platform. She began by noting that by the end of the year copies would be available to indigent litigants for free in courthouses in all five boroughs in both English and Spanish. She thanked everyone who put time into the handbook, including the non-lawyers who did free translation work, and emphasized how important it was to have help in Spanish available to Hispanic defendants. She noted, "I have the words to Emma Lazarus's New Colossus—give me your tired, your poor, etcetera—above my desk at work to remind me where I come from and who I want to help." She gave a plug for the CLEO program, a bar association initiative designed to help low-income minority students adjust to law school life. She never mentioned that she hadn't qualified as low-income after marrying Duncan.

The crowd applauded heavily. She returned to her seat aglow.

At the table, Nadia was flipping through a copy of the handbook.

"Ms. Gomez."

"Call me Nadia," Nadia said. Nadia pulled something unseen from the edge of her tongue as she looked again at the handbook.

“Nadia, I loved your talk, and your work. My father and I used to read everything about the United Farmworker Lawyers’ Guild and the Delano grape pickers’ strikes. It was formative. I still donate every year.”

Nadia put her hand up as if to say *this won’t be that sort of conversation*. “Since I have you here.” Nadia asked. “You’re on the Lucas Gonzalez case, correct?”

“I’m sure you’ve been busy with the case of the self-murdering duplicate. I heard he triplicated, rather than duplicated, and the DA’s office is stalling the appeal so the police can track him down.”

“Who said that?”

“Just scuttlebutt.” Nadia shrugged.

Catarina relaxed. “There were millions of rumors about that one. From conspiracies that he was Son of Sam to saying I went easy on him because we’re both Hispanic.”

“Really?”

“About a million phone calls because I didn’t object to bail. Maybe if everyone is calling me a bleeding heart anyway, I should come join you instead,” Catarina said lightly, half-joking.

Nadia laughed too heartily.

“What’s funny?” Catarina asked.

“This manual is wonderful. It shows you care. But I don’t hire people who have been to the other side too long. I find they forget themselves a bit and develop a ‘prosecutorial mindset’—almost for survival. Wouldn’t you agree?”

Catarina couldn’t fathom a correct answer to this. Her instinct was to explain her grandmother’s theory that activists should aim for positions of real power where they can decide things, but caught herself, aware that Nadia was a zealot. “I haven’t forgotten who I am,” Catarina

said finally. “I’ve prosecuted murderers, run trials, proven criminal conspiracies. How could that experience be less valuable than a recent graduate?”

“The estate of Manuel Ramirez is my client. A plaintiff case against the City. Is his name familiar?”

“He died awaiting arraignment right after the riots, while I was on-duty. I asked the marshals to make sure everyone had water.”

“Before, or after Mr. Ramirez’s death?” Nadia asked.

Catarina stiffened. “After. I only learned anything after. It was a difficult day.” Catarina hadn’t thought of the boy since the split. She had no idea if the City had taken steps to avoid similar situations.

“Difficult enough to suspend civil rights?”

“I’m not comfortable discussing cases where I could be a witness.”

Nadia smiled like a wolf. “Of course not. I’m glad you remember his name.” Nadia’s eyes, pierced through Catarina, seemingly weighing her worth. “You seem capable, and to care. That’s not the issue, if we are talking seriously about you switching sides. Well, I shouldn’t say . . . we have a strict policy against telling donors the truth about themselves.”

Catarina smiled against her mood. “I won’t stop donating.”

“I need true believers with me in the trenches. You’re not a trenches girl; you’re a palace girl. All palace girls I’ve met think they can be trenches girls. And I’ve met many of you.”

“That’s not true at all,” Catarina said.

“I’ll show you. You were at Columbia in the sixties, right?”

“Barnard, then Columbia Law.”

“Yes. And did you join SDS? Ever go to a protest?”

“No, but I felt solidarity. I attended those Liberation School classes. And I’ve followed what they preached: I’ve never fallen into supporting roles to men, and I’ve used my influence to help people.” The women-only classes were taught by instructors who Duncan had called beads-in-the-doorframe-patchouli types. They were disorganized and Catarina didn’t like their anti-Catholic vibes. but Catarina had taken to heart their advice to avoid wasting energy helping men fulfill their own goals while sidelining her own.

“Of course: you sympathized, and touched your toes in the water of women’s issues, immigrant issues, but had your studies and future career to focus on. You were the first in your family in college, and so forth. Right. The last woman I hired for the position was arrested three times before she graduated law school.”

A pregnant pause followed. Catarina didn’t think through a response because the exercise seemed so arbitrary. Her mistake was not going to jail?

“Last question,” Nadia went on. “Do you support the Hyde Amendment? That is, do you agree with Carter that there’s many things in life that aren’t fair for the poor, and that the federal government shouldn’t help pay for abortions for women who can’t afford them?”

“You don’t even handle abortion cases!”

“Humor me. I’m sure you’ve fielded more inappropriate interview questions than that before.”

“At a time where we can hardly afford police officers or garbagemen, I don’t think that we should spend federal tax dollars to put a thumb on scale of a morally complex question. Judges deciding that abortion is a constitutional right remains wildly unpopular—something like half of America disagrees with *Roe v. Wade*—and now you’re asking those same Americans to help pay for abortions through Medicaid.”

“Aha! I was right! That cross. When does life start, Catarina?”

“That’s impossible to answer; only God knows.”

“It is possible to know, without being God. I’ll show you: I could say that a fetus can’t sustain itself or has no consciousness, but you know what I do say? Life starts at birth, because if life starts at conception then abortions will be performed illegally and unsafely by desperate women, whereas if life starts at birth then they’ll be done legally by medical professionals. Do you see my point? When I hear members of Congress debate which sort of rape victim is sufficiently sympathetic to warrant an exception, that provides moral clarity. I want women to be safe, so the answer is clear. You see greys, and that is fatal where you need to believe in any cause ten times more than the people you’re trying to convince.”

In a pause, deflation went through Catarina’s body. “What the kind of foolish qualification is being pro-choice for helping immigrants? All the immigrants I grew up around were pro-life Catholics. You’re just a bunch of out-of-touch degree holders who think you know what’s good for everyone else.”

Nadia leaned back and her lips froze into a stiff smile, that read almost as taking a secret satisfaction from getting a rise out of Catarina. “Catarina, I’m sorry if I offended you. You’re taking me too seriously. I have a Jewish husband, a sweet man who I love dearly. He says in Jewish culture a child’s life doesn’t start until he graduates from medical school.”

Catarina breathed in and out hard. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to raise my voice. Obviously, you touched on an issue that’s sensitive for us both.” Inside, her deflation crumbled into anger at being rejected for a position she hadn’t even applied for. Now, she didn’t even hypothetically want the job. Nadia seemed the personification of the college activist who never grew up, the ones who came up to the pro-life booth Catarina manned and mocked her. A memory surfaced of a classmate’s high-pitched, righteous voice shaming Catarina for caring about unborn children when America was involved in war crimes in Vietnam.

“Here is my advice,” Nadia continued. “If you get sick of the DA’s office, go to an investment bank, where they’ll love your Ivy League polish. Charm your way in, then hire Chicanas who haven’t had the chances you’ve had, or use your connections to become a judge and hire Hispanic interns and clerks, then send the idealists to me. Pick up the phone and call and tell me, ‘Nadia, I found a great prospect for you,’ and I swear I’ll pick up that call every time and remember you. We need people like you badly, just not on the inside. And please keep donating, you asked for honesty and I’m giving it to you, one lady from the barrio to another.”

Catarina remained silent in response, then broke off eye contact. Catarina noted they hadn’t slipped into Spanish once. Suddenly, Nadia seemed very out-of-touch with her roots.

“Am I being too harsh?” Nadia asked. “I’m told that.”

“No. No. Thank you for your honesty. I’ll keep donating.” Catarina hoped her tone conveyed that she’d never give another penny.

“That’s good to hear. I’m a tired old lady. I’ve been at this too long, don’t take me too seriously. Have a good afternoon, Catarina.”

“Thanks.”

Nadia stood with her food tray. “I look forward to the interns you send me.”

“Me too,” Catarina said, and was left alone.

As Catarina left the building, she paused and leaned her head against an ornate granite column, and cried; quietly at first, then noisily. She was startled out of this by a young-ish, clean-cut Latin man in a suit who glanced at Catarina blankly. She couldn’t pull herself together, and so ducked in a random staircase to continue, hoping he didn’t see her face. She hoped that they never ran into each other again. Thirty years old and she was still crying after professional encounters.

When she reached the fresh air of the sidewalk, the tingling around her eyes wasn't so bad. Walking to the subway, she longed to be with Leonard, only one of him in an uncomplicated way. The entire new arrangement felt frivolous. She called Leo at the law office, but he said he'd be home late. He offered to sneak out, but she insisted she'd be fine. Not wanting to return to an empty space, she compulsively called Alice, who was alone and warmly invited Catarina to join her. Arturo was out with Dean.

Catarina rode the subway to Alice's place, and the passage into Brooklyn seemed to be a passage from her public to private life. She clutched her purse to her stomach and looked around at the other passengers. The entire train car was covered in graffiti, contrasting with the Italian grandmothers she'd purposefully chosen to sit by. Further down the car was a mishmash of colors: red bandanas, denim shirts with bright yellow punk patches, gold necklaces over hairy chests. One mulleted man wore matching zebra-striped shoes and jacket.

Catarina arrived at Alice's about forty minutes later, and wished they lived closer together.

At the door, Alice said "I've something I've *got* to show you." She hooked her arm around Catarina's with casual intimacy and familiarity, and led her up the stairs. Catarina found herself a bit afraid of Alice for reasons hard to pin. Why did she have the impulse to call and visit Alice? Understand Alice better and use that information to feel more secure in the developing arrangement? Become friends? Sister-wives? Lovers? Or maybe she had just had a bad day, and wanted a little intimacy.

"Here we go." Alice and Catarina reached the studio space on the third floor, where you could wander and look at works on display during Alice's parties. Alice opened the door, peeked in, then turned back to Catarina. "So my friend Mindy's doing some work for Judy Chicago. This project called," she paused, then said, "'Twenty-Five Women Eaten Alive'. Something like that. Just so you're prepared when you go in. This is going to the Brooklyn Museum soon, right on the other

side of Prospect Part, but I got it on loan. In part because her studio is getting crowded.” She squinted. “The piece involves a lot of vaginas.”

“Okay.”

“You’re ready for a lot of vaginas?”

“I’m ready. For vaginas.” Catarina said, not feeling as sure as she sounded. Alice was springing this. How could depictions of female genitalia not be crude? On the other hand, they were two women looking at artwork by a third.

Alice still paused at the door. “I’m glad you came,” Alice said. She clutched the door and swung back and forth in the frame with a dancer’s elegance.

“Me too.” Catarina smiled. “Let’s do it.”

The work in progress was laid out on a long wooden table. At the front was a note from Judy Chicago, thanking Mindy and explaining the project. The plan was to design table settings of strong, often-forgotten women from prehistory to modern day. Each setting included symbols connected to the particular woman and have as its centerpiece a plate with an image evoking the vulva. The number of settings was so large that Ms. Chicago had asked women from around the country to help. Mindy had made seven plates based on detailed guidance.

The finished pieces were laid out on the long table with each historical figure’s name by the setting. Mindy had placed cheap cups, napkins and cutlery so each plate could be envisioned in context. This contrasted with the beauty of the art.

Catarina wandered around, redness coming into her cheeks.

“This one’s nice,” Catarina said. “Ah. Margaret Sanger.”

“Who?” Alice asked.

“She started Planned Parenthood.”

“I knew you’d know them.”

Catarina lingered in front of Sanger's table setting. Sanger was a strong Catholic woman who was disliked by Catarina's childhood priest. She'd informed Catarina's view that feminism was compatible with the position that abortion was immoral and birth control the correct means to avoid unwanted pregnancy.

"What're you thinking?" Alice asked.

"Nothing," Catarina said.

"You are. You always look like you're thinking so many things."

"Sanger was constantly going to court defending women's right to birth control. She even coined the term 'birth control'. She was a legend," Catarina said. Alice would find other parts of Sanger's legacy outdated—Sanger opposed abortion and favored eugenics—but Catarina kept these thoughts in. "Though I couldn't speak to whether the plate is an accurate representation of her vagina."

"I don't think they're meant to be," Alice said with a twinkle in her eye.

At the end of the table were handmade plates and mugs bare of artwork, with a small spread of cheese and fruits that Catarina briefly mistook for more art. "I threw together some things when you said you were coming. If you can believe it," Alice said, "those plates are her mistakes. She claims if you look closely there's a blemish or something irregular. I think they're all perfect."

Catarina agreed.

As they sat to eat, the long table of legendary women evoked history, the blank misformed plates near the perfect, colorful settings. Catarina felt something—some inspiration that she wasn't doing enough, a seed of her old ambition, and shame that she'd briefly considered retreating to Philadelphia. It echoed her suspicion as she left the bar event that the inordinate time spent negotiating her relationship structures might be better spent elsewhere.

"I have a confession," Alice said.

“To a lawyer?” Catarina asked.

“Have you ever had a moment where you suspect you’ll remember it for the rest of your life, even as it’s happening?”

“You mean like your husband spontaneously replicating?”

“Yes!” Alice said. “I had one when we lunched, when you asked me to join you and Leo, with Art. I thought maybe you were marking your territory. I was so nervous.”

Catarina tipped her water glass towards Alice, then sipped.

“So,” Alice asked, “how was your day?”

For reasons unknown to herself, Catarina unloaded on Alice about her conference and the disappointing conversation with Nadia.

Catarina leaned back, considering Alice. “Nadia’s thinks I’ve developed some permanent prosecutorial mindset. I prosecute criminals, of course I adapt to do my job. But I don’t forget the people I prosecute are going inside a small cell with no privacy and minimal autonomy for long periods of time. I understand these people have done bad things, but I’m not heartless or blind to prisoners’ humanity.

“Just last year, when they were cutting prison budgets again, I sided with the wardens who were trying to get new gym equipment. Some councilmember realized money was being spent ‘to help thugs build the muscles they use to rob and commit crimes.’ That the savings were minor was irrelevant. I told them this view misunderstood the young male mind on the most basic level. Energy inside them—guilty or innocent, in jail or free—the anger, anxiety, frustration, needs to be directed somewhere. Better directed at gym equipment than fellow prisoners or the prison guards. As soon as word spread that damaged equipment wouldn’t be replaced, busting a dumbbell meant being shanked, and wardens would need to contend with more violence. Am I making sense at all?”

“Of course,” Alice said. “Refusing to let the prisoners exercise is like refusing to let me dance.”

“Exactly,” Catarina said.

Catarina relaxed. Alice wasn’t pressing on how hard Catarina was on defendants. She seemed to trust that Catarina’s reputation was undeserved, whereas many in Leo’s cohort couldn’t be shook of their prejudices against virtually all prosecutors.

Alice listened dutifully and asked questions as Catarina went on. In the end, Alice said, “I don’t know how you and Leo and Art do what you do. Sounds so stressful. I’m so impressed with all of you. I couldn’t do it.”

Catarina almost corrected Alice equating all their legal jobs as similarly impressive and rigorous, but caught herself. Catarina had obtained the more prestigious position after graduating. Now, Leo had leapfrogged everyone in the prestige hierarchy. He could become a millionaire if he made partner. This late, abrupt advancement evoked pride and a little envy. These dynamics were too obvious to be discussed amongst lawyers, but Alice’s proud glow discussing what Arturo did was a reminder that this endless prestige-sorting meant little to normal people.

“You mentioned that you wouldn’t mind taking the lead raising children—aren’t you afraid you’d miss work?” Catarina asked.

Alice nodded. “We’re not talking about forever here. I imagine with four of us, I could still teach at least part time eventually. So, yes, I think so.”

“What about having a career?”

Alice winced, broke eye contact and looked to the floor. “I feel like I gave having a career a swing, and learned that’s not for me the way that word is usually used. I can’t be at a desk I need to work with my hands or something with people. I wasn’t ambitious or talented or connected enough to dance professionally—and that was maybe the area I could have done what you did with the law.”

“You’re a teacher. That’s a great profession.”

Alice shrugged sadly. “It’s a job, not my calling. Don’t get me wrong—I love the kids, but I wouldn’t miss the paperwork or the repetition of putting on the same play every winter loses charm. And always a one-year contract—the administration doesn’t even say if we’re renewed until a month before school.”

“What did you do for money before teaching?”

“I worked in a Soho gallery for a while—was run by a rich mean woman. She’d yell if the stupidest thing was overlooked, then talk in this sticky sweet voice to customers. I was also a personal assistant to another socialite for a while—just replied to an ad. You know about the commune, which just wasn’t sustainable and got uncomfortable. I wouldn’t do that again. Compared to all those, being at home tending to kids I love sounds pretty good.”

Catarina took this in. “I get it,” Catarina said finally. “You have to get far up the success ladder before you can change what play is put on. Even then, you’re answering to parents or schoolboards or something larger outside yourself who makes the big decisions. I’m lucky to have a little discretion, but even I sometimes doubt they’ll ever let me decide anything meaningful.”

“You don’t really think that,” Alice said.

“I do! Truly. Sometimes I suspect feminists and the STOP ERA crowd are both struggling with the same ennui from different angles—trying to find meaning in life’s drudgery. The complaints I hear from friends about their kids and their menial jobs sound identical: same resentments, same tedium, same menial tasks. Even the way feminists talk about the importance of an independent career isn’t that different from how Schlafly talks about Christian motherhood—both sides believe their solution will bring salvation. Possibly I’ve given too much weight to the feminist side, and put off motherhood out of concern around impacting my career. I do long for children.”

Alice's eyes squinted in deep, quizzical engagement. Catarina worried Alice was worrying that Catarina was patronizing her. "I guess the way I see things," Alice said finally, "is that I am a feminist. But I also want to be a mom and feel comfortable letting Arturo be the breadwinner . . . I mean, I would feel comfortable if he felt comfortable that's what he wanted, and this whole thing felt stable."

"That's a lovely sentiment," Catarina said.

"Hey," Alice said, "you and Leo have been coming by for a while now on the weekends, and that's been nice. When do you think we can all move in together? I charge low rent. I think us all being under one roof might help us feel secure. More real."

"Living together would be easier than getting from Brooklyn to Spanish Harlem, taking the trains at night or having to pay for car service. But I need more time. Eventually. There's so many other priorities right now." Catarina said in a friendly tone that she worried was too dismissive.

"Probably better for everyone to take each stage a little slow. I remember early in the affair I showed up with a suitcase and Leo freaked out in his way: being all quiet and sullen. He wasn't ready to see that suitcase yet—I ended up moving out into my own place for a purgatorial period instead for a while, which was helpful. Obviously, we got there."

"I didn't mean to rush you," Alice said.

"Not at all. I appreciate how you've made everyone feel welcome, and I know that you're one in a million to be understanding of our situation. Thanks for letting me ramble so much."

Alice nodded, and the conversation fell silent as Catarina took in the room. Alice's eye contact fell off and she looked at her hands.

"Perhaps I'm approaching this relationship with the wrong lens," Catarina said.

"Maybe the very frivolousness of romance means we shouldn't be torturing ourselves over what our group relationship means; and we should let it develop organically and not stress."

“I don’t think our relationship is frivolous.” Alice perked up and her eyebrows furrowed like she’d been physically hurt.

“I know it isn’t frivolous to us, but I mean compared to world events and the long arc of history, or even just our careers or health.” She regretting mentioning jobs after Alice had just pointedly offered to leave hers for family.

“You talk like someone who hasn’t been lonely in a long time,” Alice said. “I can tell you finding something this good is rare.”

Catarina pivoted. “Maybe I said that because of Nadia’s voice in my head,” Catarina said. “She got under my skin talking about how I wasn’t suitable to fight the good fight. She called me a palace girl, whatever that means.”

“This woman sounds caught up in her own issues. Like you did a wonderful thing with that manual, and this lady’s first thought was to crush your dreams. You should start your own nonprofit, show her.”

“Maybe down the line,” Catarina said.

“You should! We could have an art show to celebrate the opening, maybe raise some money for the three of you to open a law space.”

“It’s weird to feel that this is simultaneously the best and worst time of my life,” Catarina said. “The stress of events this year have made me a mess but it also feels like a fantasy. Sometimes I wake up feeling like it’s my birthday when the weekend arrives and I know we’re all going to be together.”

Something in Alice’s earnest supportiveness was endearing. The source of Arturo’s affection for Alice came into focus: having someone who reminded you the legal world wasn’t the only world; having someone with softness to them, so far removed from competitive hierarchies; someone who

saw you as the sun and the moon, and capable of anything. Even the art in the room was a nice reminder at how women could be flawed and still great.

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Catarina left Alice's feeling renewed. Perhaps they could move in eventually or even soon, and that would settle them. With Leo's new job, money would be less tight and they could organize the event planning into a nonprofit, and so forth. They were each changing so rapidly, and who was their relationship hurting? Let them do useful things during the week, and be frivolous as they liked on the weekends. Their joint home could become a space where she could be her real self without fear of judgment.

## Chapter Nine

On Saturday, December 3, Catarina rode the F-Train alone to the end of the line, to Coney Island. She clutched her purse to her stomach and looked around at the other passengers. The entire train car was covered in graffiti, which contrasted sharply with the old Italian grandmothers who took up most of the seats nearest to her. She'd purposefully chosen to sit by them. Further down the car was a mishmash of colors: red bandanas, denim shirts with bright yellow punk patches, gold necklaces over hairy chests. One mulleted man wore matching zebra-striped shoes and jacket.

She got off the train, and walked along Shore Road, pausing at a dead-eyed mannequin fortune-teller who sat behind glass in a wooden box, holding cards that asked for ten cents and read, "She has your lucky numbers and your answers." Something superstitious tempted Catarina to put in a coin, but she walked on.

She found Stewy Cromwell by the handball courts. He looked almost unrecognizable in shorts and a bright orange exercise shirt. He also looked underdressed—the temperature was in the mid-forties, less with windchill. Catarina smiled and forgot why she was there. She approached between sets.

"Counselor," Catarina shouted. "A word?"

He gave her a slightly confused look, then waved off his partner walked a few steps with her to the side of the court.

"Please," Cromwell said softly, "don't call me that here. No one knows. Like to let them all guess whether I'm a wiseguy or something when people in suits show up."

"Sorry." She felt some comfort that she wasn't the first person to interrupt his weekend handball games to deliver bad news.

“It’s alright. Worse would be to see one of them in a courtroom. Thankfully I’m in another jurisdiction,” he said. “Well, what is it?”

“I’m here to talk about the Lucas case,” Catarina said in a low voice.

“Where’s O’Donnell on this?”

“I couldn’t get ahold of him. Not his fault, this is so last minute—”

“Yes. Yes.” He looked as if he wanted to ask if it could wait. “Let me finish this set,” he said.

She watched the game, not certain of the rules or how long a set went. The sidewalk was full of Nathan’s hot dog wrappers, soda cans, drug vials and other trash. Many of the Astroland amusement park rides looked shut down or barely operated—most because it was offseason, but more than a few had shut permanently. An unruly sort wandering the boardwalk, and distant atonal music came from the empty bumper car station. The place was entirely transformed from the festive park she visited with Leonard just a decade ago.

After the handball set ended, Cromwell returned. They walked to the boardwalk, where their clothing flapped in a sandy, heavy wind. Cromwell’s bald head glistened. They found some worn wooden picnic benches and sat down across from each other. She placed her elbows on the table and filled him in: the defense had told her Lucas had actually triplicated, and there was a third Lucas living in a cheap flat on the Bowery. Now that he’d surfaced, Lucas’s defense team would be moving for a mistrial because the second kid would claim he’d actually been the one to swing the bat. The media had gotten wind, somehow. The stories would run in the Sunday papers.

He listened quietly until she was finished. Then he cleared his throat. “I will say,” he said, “it sounds like that kid somehow managed to make our most batshit case ever even more batshit. How did we not know this?”

Catarina swallowed. She couldn't say she'd warned everyone that Lucas's story didn't add up without throwing O'Donnell under the bus. "Kid kept quiet, and this all went down right after the riots. Apparently, he has his own attorney."

"A triplicate? Is that even possible? Or did he split again while on bail?"

"TriPLICATION. They had some dumb scheme where they thought each could pin it on the other somehow and get away with it. Maybe they saw too many movies where defendants go free on technicalities."

He mulled this. "What do you want to do?"

"Well, we could come down hard. Get the first Lucas for perjury, obstruction with his confession. But the election is over. Maybe we have a window with a little more flexibility, where we can clear this out fast before Koch gets in. Otherwise, how does it look that we missed this?"

She continued, explaining that after realizing Lucas's secret legal strategy would fail—and both boys had potentially long sentences hanging over them—they were now eager to accept plea deals. They were asking that the pleas not include crimes that were of moral turpitude or aggravated felonies, so Lucas could avoid deportation after being released from prison. She wanted to grant this request because deportation back to Argentina after winning asylum could be a death sentence—the justice and immigration systems would together be indirectly committing the same act (killing Lucas Gonzalez) that they were punishing the defendants for having committed.

Cromwell nodded, looking around at the graffiti.

"I was thinking we could get ahead of the press," Catarina said, "and avoid the pain of the more trials by offering them both seven-year plea deals, probation after three. Basically, splitting the sentence between them."

"If we retry it, couldn't we give them both fifteen?" Cromwell asked,

“Possibly. Possibly the original verdict will even withstand appeal. But do we really want this drawn out? Tomorrow this is going to get out, and either the story will be these kids got one over us, or that they split and they both are getting half the sentence.”

He looked her over carefully. “Fuck it. Let’s make it go away. Draft something up.”

“I’ve got something ready to sign.” She pulled papers and a pen out of her purse. “One for each of them.”

He looked over it with greater care than she expected—rewording sections and fixing small typos. She could tell he was getting chilly from the goosebumps forming on his bare middle-aged flesh. He was no longer exercising, but was still in his workout clothes, making the exposure worse. Finally, he reached the last page. The pen vibrated in his hands as he signed. He stood up and handed the documents to her.

“Get it done and out to the press once the defendants has signed. Have both surviving triplicates sign both pleas so they don’t play more games. I can smooth this over with O’Donnell Monday, though best case would be if you reach him before it’s signed by the defendants. You’re seeing not just what the law allows but the politics and practicalities too. That’s good. Not everybody does,” he said. He sighed like something more troubled him—something heavy. “The original Steeplechase Park had a parachute jump that was my favorite thing as a kid. Gone now. Coney Island’s dangerous now but I still come. So many wonderful memories. Anyway. Things change. We change.”

She nodded and he nodded.

“Unless there’s anything further,” he said, “I’ll return to my game.”

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The following Monday, Catarina was called into O'Donnell's office, and entered unsure of the fallout from her weekend actions. He was smiling, but oddly, an uncommon and unnerving sight.

"Hello, Catarina, how's your family?" asked O'Donnell, his voice sounding rusty, like he'd been singing or partying all weekend. He leaned in closely as he shook her hand formally with both hands. Looking around, she saw he'd been packing up his office.

"Everyone's fine," Catarina said. "So, Koch pulled it off, huh? Mayor Koch, funny ring."

"The city wanted law and order," he said, "and he was the city law and order candidate. Easy math."

"So that's good for you, right?" Catarina asked. He'd long been rumored to be in line for a prime Koch administration slot.

"Today's my last day, or the end of the month technically, for benefits and all that. But today's the last day I'll be in the office."

"Goodness, that's fast. That's great! You're joining the administration?"

"No, well, yes," he said. "Koch is still taking me on as an advisor. Nothing announced. A patronage position, nothing too important. More of a vacation, compared to busting my balls at this shit-show." He was jittery, avoiding her eyes as he continued boxing items and rubbing his fingers against his thumbs. What had read as elation now seemed manic.

"I'm sorry we haven't had much time to catch up between the trial, the election and the—" She sat down in front of his desk with the Lucas appeal on her lap. The topic now seemed unworthy of discussion. "But look, I can save the case for the next guy. Congratulations!"

"No. No. No." O'Donnell stopped packing and sat across from her. "You wanted to talk about the Lucas appeal?"

She explained about the news of triplication. As one point she was cut off as O'Donnell had a coughing fit. She waited to subside. The coughs sounded dry. He waved her concern away and drank a little water, then winced like the water was strong whiskey. "Ignore. I'm fine. Continue. It's good."

"Long story short," Catarina sped up, "we're going to give them each seven years."

"Didn't I just got done saying Koch campaigned on being tough on crime. Who are we to disappoint the public?"

"It's done already. Stewy signed off."

"You went over my head?"

"I couldn't get ahold of you all weekend, including the home phone. It seemed urgent." He looked dumbfounded. Since he didn't say anything, she kept going. "Anyway, this is a good outcome. I told the detectives it made no sense that the boy carried the body alone, and I'm still not sure that piece adds up even with two of them carrying the third."

After a while, O'Donnell simply nodded and said, "Alright then. Sounds like you have this under control." He seemed genuine—almost disinterested.

"I think so. Hey listen, since you're leaving, I also wanted to say, you've been a great mentor," she said, then added playfully, "mostly. I'm sorry to see you go."

"Still sore over the machismo comment, huh?" he asked. "Well, you've probably thought a lot of my advice was bunk over the years, and mostly bit your tongue and ignored it to good effect. Well, thanks. There's one more thing. I, um, here," he said woodenly, not meeting her eyes. He handed her a small case. She snapped it open, revealing an engraved pen. "I thought we were going to lose you for a while there. At a certain stage, good female employees tend to leave—their husbands get a promotion, or kids come into the picture and they move back to wherever they're

from to be closer to parents. They get a look in their eyes. Get less focused at work. Thought we might lose you to, Pittsburgh was it?”

“Philly.”

“Right, lovely place. I know the last few months have been tough. I thought the riots and murder trial might be the straw that broke you. But you’ve been tough. I wanted you to have something—especially for your help during the last few years. A lot of attorneys weren’t worth the steam off my piss, pardon the phrase. Wasn’t fair, what we had to ask right after cutbacks and late paychecks. But we asked, and you delivered, so I’m—Oh now, oh now, it’s just a stupid pen,” he said, trailing off. As he moved a box of tissues on his desk towards her in case, she noted blistering around the wrist of his right arm.

She must have looked more touched than she intended. He’d never made any kind gesture to anyone, so far as she knew. She laughed despite herself. “Thanks,” she said. “That means a lot. Not a woman’s etiquette book, even.”

He chuckled. “I’ll save that for Maddie. Though she’d probably throw it at me.” His swagger was off, something distracted.

What caused blisters on a wrist? No drugs Catarina knew of—they looked more like scalds from boiling water.

He continued, “I recommended to Stewy that he bump you to senior assistant district attorney when I leave. Based on his response, though, you shouldn’t count on that.”

Senior assistant attorney was barely better than the position she had. She’d considered that promotion a matter of course. “Why not?” she asked.

“Unofficially, word is no changes that require raises next year. It’s bullshit—same person said Eddie quietly was promoted to senior assistant. But I’ve seen the budget and it is ugly, so the rest of us may have to tighten our belts.”

“Eddie? Eddie Fernandez?” She gave him a disgusted look. During her first Friday in the prosecutor’s office, Eddie had called Catarina from down the hall and asked her to his office, where he offered her whiskey, saying Friday drinks was a D.A.’s Office tradition. She’d accepted to be a sport. Then he’d offered her cocaine, and said he always had some available if she was working late. She declined. Then he’d made a romantic advance, which she’d also declined. Later that year, when he met Leonard, he went on and on about his experience boar hunting with a knife.

“Eddie’s a prick and lousy prosecutor,” O’Donnell said. “But his dad has pull, so maybe that. And David’s good at what he does but falls for bullshit swagger sometimes. Eddie *looks* like a good prosecutor. I should’ve fired David and put you in a while back. Give the bastards a year or two, and I promise I’ll remind them if they forget. And we try again.”

She smiled as best she could, a little more of her desire to remain at the D.A. Office’s leaking away. “Thanks for being honest. And for the pen. I’ll see ya.”

“I’ll see ya. No wait, wait, one more thing,” he said. She froze. He was silent long enough, seemingly struggling to build up courage to speak, such that she feared he might proposition her. She had never gotten signals of romantic interest from him, but she remembered the dirty matchbooks Maddie had come across.

“I want to tell you what happened if you want to hear it,” he said finally. “Why I’m really leaving.”

“I see.” She considered the value of not knowing, if this might shatter her illusion of having found a decent boss. “What happened?”

He nodded. “You’ll hear a lot of things and you’d do well to know the truth.” He scratched beneath his eyes. “I’m being pushed out. After everything I’ve done for this place.”

She searched for a joke to lighten tension. “Fuck this place. Fuck them,” she said brightly. “They don’t deserve you.” Leonard had once said this to her when she’d been turned down for a job. “Sir,” she added.

O’Donnell’s eyebrows went up, but this did the trick of breaking through something.

“Over the weekend, I was at Lindy Hotel, north of the Flatiron.”

“I haven’t heard of it.”

“You wouldn’t have. But you might see that name in the papers. Inside, they call it the Angelico Palace. You following?”

She nodded. “Palace” often meant escort service. Likely, given the location and name, the space was someplace not quite high-end but a ring significantly more sophisticated and curated than street prostitutes. Briefly, she entertained the idea that he’d been undercover—he was on a task force to shut such places down. But DAs didn’t typically do that sort of thing, and Catarina’s prosecutorial instinct read O’Donnell’s body language as guilty.

“Why?” she asked, pleading for an excuse.

“I wish I knew. I felt alive there. The risk of discovery, maybe was part of the thrill. Things at home aren’t bad but Janice and I, we don’t—” He shook his head. “More than you need to know. Doesn’t matter now, a ballbuster of a fire took the whole place Saturday. Started next door.” He raised his sleeve, revealing that the blisters went all the way up his right arm. He winced and rolled it back down.

Anger, disappointment and uncomfortable kinship flooded Catarina’s veins. “You’re part of the prostitution task force.”

“Galletti, it was awful,” he said, ignoring her comment. “People dying of smoke inhalation. Place probably hadn’t had a proper inspection since the fifties—they’d added some thick privacy curtains and even blocked windows with wood. The firefighters couldn’t get through fast enough. I

helped as much as I could. Couple of officers I knew showed up, an important detective. He never liked me. You'd think he'd caught me with his girlfriend in the Palace."

"Jesus." She put her hand to her mouth. "How is Janice?"

"She's grateful that I'm mostly intact. And with the other part, she'd known but not known for a while."

"What happens now? Will you be prosecuted?"

Another coughing fit followed, this time into a napkin. "Now I go away quietly. With the rumors surrounding Koch's campaign, Koch can't have another guy with a scandal. And he's campaigned about shutting down the palaces and the baths. Law and order. So I'm being taken as a low-level 'advisor on policing issues' as a favor until I find a new gig." He looked around the office as though searching for items he might be forgetting. "Well, that's all, I just wanted you to know why I was leaving. Now you know."

"Jesus," Catarina repeated and crossed herself. "My husband duplicated after the riots."

"You're fucking kidding me. Leonard?" His eyes lit up in shock. "Why get on the Lucas case? What are you doing there? You want me to move you?"

"No, I can run the case. One of them moved out so I think that danger of a negative reaction has really passed."

He swallowed and looked generally uncomfortable, thinking through the angles. He looked like he had too much shock already to experience more. "I noticed you change right after the riots. I thought it was burnout or problems at home. Or maybe with the riots you were ready to quit to have children." A reflective look came over him. "Funny how we've all got secrets," he coughed, then sighed. "Maybe if everyone aired out our dirty laundry, we'd be better off. Instead, we're—"

"No. We need to keep private matters private," she said.

“Don’t you think I know that!?” he shouted in a flare of anger, then his voice softened. “It’s just that, if this job has taught me anything, humans aren’t good enough for purity tests. Everyone’s a scoundrel, if you look closely. I just got caught.”

Her voice softened to match his. “There isn’t another deputy I want to work for here.” Inside, part of her meant this and part was uneasy with the fresh knowledge that he frequented brothels.

“You’ll have options. Still, that’s kind of you. Stewy understands talent even if he’s a cold fish.”

“Talent like Eddie Fernandez?”

He laughed. “Someone picked up a phone for Eddie; I don’t know who. But eventually people who get ahead through connections wash out because they can’t do the job. Talent rises to the top.”

“I—” She suppressed her mom’s voice saying how the world really worked. “If you’re asked, could you tell people you knew about the duplication sooner?”

He looked uncomfortable, and she regretted asking. “My career isn’t over yet,” he said. “Anyway, Stewy wouldn’t believe it.”

“Of course. Thank you for the pen, for everything.” She stepped forward to hug him.

He put his hands up protectively. “The burns.”

She stepped back. “Right. Thank you,” she said.

She left with tears forming.

\* \* \*

A hastily organized trip to the cop bar with Maddie immediately followed.

“Swear you didn’t know O’Donnell was in trouble,” Catarina said.

“You’re the favorite. If he was going to tell anyone secrets it wouldn’t be me.” Maddie said.

“I just thought maybe you got an inkling, the way you talked about those dirty matchbooks in his drawer, what were you even doing looking for a pen?” Catarina said.

“I needed a pen!”

Catarina looked suspicious, then let it go.

“I’m going to need to call Home to tell her I’ll be late.” She went to the payphone, leaving Catarina to stew over the facts. Maddie did seem devastated by the news, and she did often ignore that sort of office decorum. She sometimes took rubber bands that Catarina was still using for her ever-growing rubber band ball.

“Fine, you didn’t know,” Catarina said as Maddie returned.

“That’s a relief,” Maddie said, sipping her whiskey.

“It’s sweet how you call Susan ‘Home.’ I love that idea.”

“Thanks,” Maddie said, sounding a little miffed beneath her drunken sadness.

“Have you ever been tempted to visit those places? Plato’s Retreat, swingers’ clubs, the bathhouses?” Catarina said, trying to take the conversation in a less somber direction.

“Plato’s Retreat is more for women who only like kissing other women in front of straight men, and the bathhouses are more a gay scene.”

“No women?”

“Gay and lesbian communities don’t mingle as much as you might expect. They have their bars and we have ours. Second, bathhouses, ugh. I wouldn’t go to them if I was a guy. Always sounded so unhygienic. Definitely more of seedy scene than a Maddie scene.”

“I never got the allure of those places either.” Catarina laughed. “What is a Maddie scene like?”

“We’re more housecats, Home and I. We don’t dance or go out much. Dinner parties are more what we can manage. Japanese Karaoke sometimes. Have you heard of that?”

Catarina shook her head.

“We should go out. It’s fun. I miss Leo and Art. Every time you guys have drama, they disappear. Am I not a good confidant? I tell him my shit when I’m down. Tell him I want to be there for him. Send him my way.”

“He’ll appreciate that.”

“No, he won’t because you’re not going to say anything. You’re drunk and you’ll forget.”

“I won’t.”

“Forget it. The Maddie scene. Hmm . . . other than karaoke you’re already part of all the stuff I do.” She squeezed Catarina’s shoulder. “Until the duplication, you two were a big part of my life. I have like three tier-one friends outside Home.”

“As always, we’re honored by our placement,” Catarina said. Maddie had always grouped her friends into three rigid tiers: close friends, sorta friends and acquaintances; Catarina suspected Maddie even had the list penciled in a notebook somewhere, full of erasures and re-rankings.

“Down to only three tier-one friends now, four with the duplication. My point is I don’t have a second social life you don’t know about. Home loves insects. Enough to get a PhD in insects. How many people could stand us?”

“But you have her friends over and they know?”

“We live in the Village and have a one bedroom so, yeah. I guess people who study insects aren’t as judgmental as lawyers?”

“Aren’t you afraid that work will find out?”

Maddie’s face grew dull and distant. “I compartmentalize and count on institutional incompetence. The office wants to inflict conservative norms but lacks the organization wherewithal to enforce them. Holy shit, can you tell I live with a PhD?” She started to stand then sat back in the chair. “I’m going to pee in my chair maybe. No, I’m not, I’m fine.”

Catarina looked at her own drink. “I’m finally understanding what you’ve been living with, watching O’Donnell go down so suddenly. The fear of discovery. All of it.”

Maddie’s face winced, like she was biting back her thoughts. “Anyway, all of that doesn’t matter now; losing O’Donnell is the end of the line for me.”

“Don’t be melodramatic.”

“I’m not melodramatic, I’m cocky. That’s why people don’t like me. But I see the way the wind is blowing. You?”

“Things are actually going well. This two-household solution is working.”

Maddie huffed.

“You don’t think so?”

“Please don’t ask.”

“Why?”

“I’m afraid for our friendship.”

“Afraid for our friendship?” Catarina smiled at the idea of anything so damning now, after all they’d been through. “Never. Just go ahead.”

“Here’s the thing,” Maddie said. “On the one hand you’ve both been tier-one for years, even before you knew each other. And I’m picky, another reason why I don’t have many friends. So, there’s that. Then there’s also how I imagine moral people should behave, and how differently I would act in your situation. But I also get that people’s behavior often mystifies me, and I don’t *want* to lose your friendships.”

“Maddie, say your thoughts.” Coldness crept into Catarina’s tone.

“You’re all acting like things are totally okay, but from the sidelines your choices look reckless and maybe immoral. Arturo started dating Alice because he didn’t want to be alone, and he was only alone for a really short time. I don’t know Alice well, but I wouldn’t want anyone dating

me to bring in their recent ex-wife, who they were obviously still into. So, something is going on there.”

“I didn’t understand all that either, but people do strange things when they’re heartbroken.”

“And,” Maddie interrupted, plowing forward, “and then for you, I’m not sure it’s okay to drag out the decision of which one to stay with.”

“This isn’t dragging it out. This could be what we do from here on out.”

“I just don’t see it playing out that way, with everyone being happy with the situation, and that makes me uncomfortable.”

This struck a nerve by echoing Catarina’s own unease around enjoying feeling wanted by two men. “You’re judging me? You’ve got a wife at home.”

“That’s not the same. And calling my wife ‘Home’ isn’t cute or sweet. It’s a survival mechanism. I don’t appreciate your equating O’Donnell’s whoring or your newfound experimentation with my life. You’re like O’Donnell maybe. If you get caught, what—you’ll be forced to go take a demotion like him in the Koch administration? That’s a pretty soft landing, don’t you think?”

“Keep your voice down.”

Maddie pushed Catarina’s offered hand away. “No, you need to hear this. You’re afraid of a demotion? Of not moving up? The fact that you even have aspirations of moving up means we’re orbiting different worlds. Psychiatrists only stopped diagnosing my desires as ‘insane’ five years ago. I could still go to jail for who I sleep with. You’re afraid of a god nobody has seen in 2,000 years and your mom’s cold shoulder. My mom hasn’t spoken to me since I was twenty. My father only comes around when he needs money. So, don’t equate us.”

Catarina wiped a tear from her eye, anger competing with guilt as she composed her response. “I didn’t mean to equate our situations. I’ve always thought you were brave for being who

you were. Balancing Home and the fact that you love prosecuting. I'm sorry if it came out that way, I only meant living in fear of discovery has taught me something."

Maddie nodded, took a long drink. After she put her glass down, she squinted into the distance. Her brow tightened then softened, as though different emotions were battling inside her. "You know I'd support any arrangement if everyone seemed happy, but that's not what you have right now. You have Leo at home, and Arturo and Alice in Brooklyn on the weekends. Who is happy in that situation? Arturo is used to being your husband, and don't you think Alice wants that from him too?"

"You're calling me selfish?"

"I didn't say selfish. You guys landed that way because of things outside your control."

Catarina's anger overwhelmed her guilt. "You're implying I'm being selfish. I can't believe you. They started this, not me. Alice lived in a sex cult upstate; Leonard has always been adventurous. I'm the one out of my comfort zone, and you're going to hold against me that I'm enjoying myself?"

"I just wonder how the two of them feel on Mondays, because I know how I'd feel as either of them. Nothing about this feels like my idea of what moral people would do. So, either you're moral and it's maybe my idea of morality that needs to change, or you're not moral, in which case I probably shouldn't be first-tier friends with you too."

The rebuke reverberated through Catarina. "We know the risks. We're adults. It's not your business."

"No, it's not," Maddie said. "But I feel I should say something to Arturo."

"And tell him what?"

"That as his friend, I think he should get out."

“Don’t say anything. You’ll lose his friendship. And this isn’t about you. This is about my marriage.”

An awkward quiet went on until their drinks were empty.

“Okay. Sorry.”

“I don’t want to talk about this anymore. Ever.”

“Okay. Sorry,” Maddie repeated.

Maddie’s glazed look changed to blinking-to-stay-awake. It was time to go home.

Catarina asked the bartender called a car service for Maddie, then called Susan and told her to expect a drunken package.

“Everything alright?” Susan asked.

“Just . . . too much whiskey remembering our lost general,” Catarina said.

“You sound like you’ve been crying. Was he that great a boss?”

Catarina wiped her eyes. Susan was right. “No, I mean he was fine, but I just cry easily.”

They paused, then Susan said. “Okay, I’ll keep my out for a drunken package.”

After they hung up, Leo’s new salary emboldened Catarina to order a second car for herself instead of taking the subway; indulgences nostalgic of ones she took with Duncan’s money. The cars arrived quickly. Just before Catarina put Maddie in the black car, Maddie said, “Tell Arturo to call me. I don’t care about your business. I really don’t. You’re a good friend, an old friend. I can’t not say things sometimes. I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay. We’ll all come around for dinner soon. Alice too,” Catarina said back and waved goodbye. As the car service drove off Catarina was left with the lonely feeling of having lost an old friendship which, if true, would mean she’d also lost her two closest work allies in a single day.

On the ride back to Spanish Harlem, an indignant anger surfaced; Maddie's threat to tell Arturo to leave her grated. A desire flared up to control the flow information between Maddie and Arturo until she could at least predict the outcome and how to respond.

## Chapter Ten

As the holidays approached, the New York City Bar Association put on its annual winter gala for city prosecutors, defense attorneys, and judges.

On the way from the subway from 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, Catarina passed smut shops and drug dealers, but once inside she was transported to an older time. The City Bar was built in a neoclassical style like the nearby NY Public Library and Bryant Park—a product of nostalgia in the 1800’s for an even older era. The opening hall was full of Hudson School paintings and oil portraits of old city bar presidents. Grand limestone columns lined the walls, overcompensating for the association’s diminished influence compared to the state and federal bars.

Heading to the gala ballroom, Catarina stopped off at the bathroom to add some large hoop earrings and a chunky necklace she thought the older guests might appreciate but she didn’t want to wear walking over. From there, she checked assigned seating chart and found herself placed at the table of Stewy Cromwell, the District Attorney himself. Leo, who had arrived separately, was assigned to the “Wives’ Table.”

She searched for him. The space was noisy when she kneeled next to him and asked how he was fairing. She thought of teasing him that maybe he was enjoying all the feminine attention, but he looked uncomfortable.

“Sorry, I didn’t know they’d put you here. It’s new, right?”

He smiled and whispered, “It’s only no-spouses for the Big Shot table. I guess real estate near Stewy is valuable.”

“How’s it going? You regaling them with trial stories?”

“No. They’re all housewives. Stewy’s wife announced early on that we’re allowed to speak of anything but law. ‘Anything’ apparently means buying curtains at Macy’s and *MASH*.”

“Oh no.” She rubbed his leg.

“I don’t think they want me here either. I’m making everyone self-conscious.”

“Maybe talk about cooking?”

He looked at the table skeptically. “I tried. It’s all meat and microwaves. I’ll survive. Go charm Stewy.”

“I’ll make it up to you.” She kissed his hand and resisted an urge to fiddle with his collar.

Stewy Cromwell was alone at her designated table reviewing a stack of marked-up briefs and wiping his face with a napkin. He was eating a bagel with lox, even though dinner was about to be served.

“I heard a rumor that the CIA attempted to recruit you. That true?” Cromwell asked.

“Yes.” She looked over to Leo, who’d just made the housewives laugh. She imagined a world in which a woman could have two husbands at her guest table, and laughed inside at the absurdity. “But don’t be too impressed, they recruited Gloria Steinem.”

“Steinem. Yes, I read about her work for them somewhere, though I can’t say I’m very familiar with her views. Not much time for glossies,” Cromwell said. “How did they recruit you?”

“They found me; I didn’t apply. This was during Vietnam on Columbia campus, so they kept a low profile. Literally I got a tap on the shoulder by a visiting lecturer. They were targeting certain grades, certain languages, skills and backgrounds. I just did some initial training. I would have been a case officer. Good money, but I didn’t really want to go to South America. Besides, I’d already taken the LSAT.”

“Wily bastards, aren’t they? Obviously, this was before the Church Committee aired their dirty laundry. Case officer isn’t so bad a position; the agents are the real suckers.” His cynicism was surprising and refreshing. “Learn anything useful?”

“I can read documents upside-down while speaking.”

“Really?”

“You’re reviewing *People v. Manuel Domingo*, a daytime burglary in Hell’s Kitchen. Your ADA likes adverbs but you don’t.”

He laughed and took an unflatteringly large bite of his bagel and lox, which he barely chewed. “Sorry for eating while we speak. I have to leave before the meal, right after Andy’s speech. Back to the office.”

“Who killed whom?”

He gave her a bleak smile and held up his hand. “Not yet.”

She wasn’t clear if he wasn’t going to tell her who killed who or if they weren’t sufficiently close colleagues to make jokes like this.

“I know this isn’t the best situation for a private conversation,” he said, “but I make do to manage the time I have. I’ve assigned the people to this table because I’ve been meaning to speak with each of you. Betty’s doing her best to keep us organized, thus our friends are at the canopy bar.” She glanced at the hors d’ oeuvres table where a group had gathered, many glancing at Cromwell.

“Everyone understands.” The table was still empty but for them. She was in the middle of an interview; what an odd place and time.

He coughed into the napkin. “I read your section of the Bar Association’s manual for indigent defendants. Giving away some of our tricks. Would you rather be on defense side?”

“No, sir.”

“I hear you live up in Spanish Harlem?”

She nodded, about to add “until recently” but he went on too fast.

“Who do we prosecute here? 70% black and Hispanic folks? More? Same with the victims. Most crimes happening in those groups’ neighborhoods. It’s not right that we shouldn’t reflect the population impacted.” He was talking like a class traitor. Over half of the current assistant district

attorneys would be horrified. “Time to sweep out the dinosaurs. We’ll have bureau chiefs—homicide, appeals, organized crime, and the first sex-crimes unit in the country. Specialization is the future. What would your preferred position be, assuming anything were possible.”

“Human trafficking. Construction workers being used as illegal labor then kicked out of the country without being paid, irregular migration.” Her surprise didn’t allow her time to feel nerves or consider answering tactically. She simply said her true interest.

He nodded like he respected her frankness. “That isn’t going to be an option in the first wave but maybe eventually, and you can move over if it is. The Sex Crimes unit might touch on that, and having a Mexican attorney there would be helpful. But racketeering is where you belong.”

“Racketeering? Me?”

“I’m serious, Catarina. I heard Justice Klein complimented your brief from the bench.”

“Did you also hear it was tossed over the bench because it was too long?”

“Happens. Still, that’s a rare honor.”

Catarina nodded, sipped her wine, and smiled. “That’s very generous.”

“Settled. One more thing. Over the next year, I’m going to pilot a program where assistant attorneys keep their cases every stage. Indictment, bail, prosecution, appeal. Everyone needs to go in front of the jury. O’Donnell mentioned that you and your officemate Maddie are close. I’m afraid there won’t be any place to hide Maddie’s weaknesses.”

“I can make her jury-ready. I promise. Makeup, dress, demeanor. The whole thing. We’ll practice together.”

“When? Our plan is to keep you busy.”

“On our time.”

“She’ll still never be jury-ready. Some people have it, others don’t. You know in five minutes.”

“Fine. Then put her in charge of the Court of Appeals oral arguments.”

“That’s going away. You can’t create a new system and then grandfather in folks who don’t fit new roles, or else everything fails. Maddie’s good at paper, Catarina. There are plenty of places in the world for paper attorneys. The D.A.’s Office is not one of them. A fresh start for everyone. Hmm?”

“I understand,” she said, feeling she was betraying Maddie, but he wasn’t wrong that Maddie was an odd fit.

As she refocused on Cromwell, he was mid-sentence, “—killed out in Bay Ridge right across from a churchyard.”

“Why do we have it if it’s in Brooklyn?” she asked, not confident her question made sense.

“We don’t. It’s the feds. I’m getting to it. The kid is a little touched in the head, works poles for ConEd, but clean as a whistle. Yet it’s a mob-style murder. Doesn’t make sense.”

“Jesus. This past weekend?”

“All this is this past weekend. Across Brooklyn, same day, not too far apart, are two more murders, also mob-style, both the other targets have mob connections. At that third site, something goes wrong and the shooters abandon their car, one of them gets killed. Doesn’t matter. Here’s where it comes to us. I get a call the feds found copies of police database printouts in the hit men’s car, right on the front dashboard like a parking ticket, like the fuckers want us to know they’re using our paperwork to track informants and snitches. Brazen. Get this—the first, his kid’s name was Salvador Guido, and his name and address is on the printout on the windshield. But they got it wrong.”

“Guido? That’s a name? I thought it was a slur.”

“You can’t make this shit up. Not only is it a name, there’s enough of them to shoot the wrong one. Whatever corrupt detective they got running names for them was supposed to pull this

other Salvador Guido, but the right one stayed up in the Bronx. So now I've got the Eastern District feds asking me why we're giving bad information to the mob. So, you sure you want this job?" He smiled. "I hear the Eastern District feds are actually looking for bodies to fill that anti-racketeering unit. They'll hire any prosecutor with a pulse who isn't actively tied to the mafia, let alone Columbia grads. I'm told they have War Rooms for each of the five crime families. You could get them off my ass." He was describing the job Leonard had flagged in the Brooklyn Law Journal just before he duplicated.

"I'm sure I want to be here," she said. She was *in*. She said so to Cromwell without even deciding to, without hearing herself speak.

Their conversation hit a pause. She considered whether the Catarina-underneath-the-work-mask would want this opportunity, rather than the promotion being something that she *should* want because everybody around her wanted to go up the ladder. A prosecutorial home like corrupt practices was enviable, a shot to grab the brass ring. She smiled. An invitation to the top of New York's prosecutorial hierarchy.

"Alright then," he said. "The first of next month, you're in racketeering. Expect a small raise but don't get a new mortgage. Maybe you can use your CIA skills to spot some meat eaters." The Knapp Commission on police corruption had called the most corrupt cops *meat eaters*, while the ones taking small bribes were *grass eaters*. The terms stuck.

"I'll keep my eyes open," Catarina said.

He weighed her response for long enough for Catarina to wonder if she should have said something more forceful. "Good," he said finally. "Same office for right now, salary bump to follow if we ever get more funding. That part will take some time. So, we done here? I've gotta do two more of these before the speeches start up and I sneak out before someone's tempted to kiss my ass from the stage. Send Samson, he's waiting by the wall over there."

They both stood, she shook his hand. Samson was en route as soon as they stood, and so she walked over by the hors d'oeuvre table to hover discreetly. Others from their table were similarly hovering and gave her knowing looks. She acknowledged them with a smile. The cost of her victory threatened to surface but she suppressed it. She pictured herself in five minutes, when she would calmly excuse herself, walk to the bathroom, and cry in a stall simply because she was feeling extreme emotions of happiness and sadness for Maddie. The fact that she'd be able to cry soon calmed her a little.

In the bathroom stall, the tears came. This was *the* opportunity all her work was aiming towards, what had driven her from the *barrio* to college to spending the extra hour staying up studying in law school in that Central Park house with Duncan, to losing a marriage due to her focus on studies and her neglect of Duncan's needs, leading him to seek fulfillment elsewhere. This was the opportunity she'd chased as she prepared for cases in Spanish Harlem after Leonard fell asleep and, in the end, why she'd broken things off with Arturo the first time. All for this, and the spoils of a normal, professional life. *Worth it* felt like an absurd concept. What was a chance to prove yourself worth? In that moment, in the stall crying, the trade felt cruel and unfair for everyone involved, including herself, but to turn back and reject the opportunity would be to make all the sacrifices and pain pointless.

After the final interview, the District Attorney snuck out and everyone re-joined them at the table. Two other young assistant attorney generals were seated right next to her, both black men. This seemed like an intentional statement about Stewy's vision for the future of the DA's office. The three of them contrasted sharply with the rest of the table, men who looked like they were about to go sit for oil paintings to be hung in the Court of Appeals. The speeches started up and she politely listened.

\* \* \*

“Come. Come,” Alice said, her eyes full of mischief, tugging on Arturo’s arm towards a giant red NY tourist bus. “No, come.”

The plan had been to bring bagged lunches to City Hall Park before heading back to work. They had walked the Brooklyn Bridge and were walking down Broadway on a brisk winter day in midtown. This felt like a petite infidelity, since Catarina and he had walked over the Brooklyn Bridge during their courtship, such that the giant limestone towers and steel cables still evoked specific conversations.

“You have dance practice,” Arturo said. He didn’t want to say this was a silly expense. “And it’ll be cold up there.”

“I cancelled after you said your afternoon case settled,” Alice said, stepping on the red tour bus herself and looking down towards him. “Come, please. It’ll be fun: let’s learn about your city.”

“Okay, for me and my girlfriend,” he said to the driver, who nodded indifferently. Alice giggled and pushed him towards the roof of the bus, where a group of young Japanese tourists huddled in a corner taking photos of expensive buildings. They sat in the opposite corner. The tour guide was speaking in an Asian language, and while Arturo waited for him to switch to English, Alice put her hand over her mouth, suppressing laughter.

“I think I brought us on a Japanese tour,” she said. “I’m so sorry; we can get another one.” She kneaded his arm like bread, using both hands.

“No, this is fine,” Arturo said. “I’ll translate.”

“You don’t speak Japanese.”

“I do. Watch, now he’s saying, here are some old buildings. Dylan Thomas lived in this one, where he wrote West Side Story and died of pneumonia.”

“That’s not right.”

“Yeah, a shame these tourists don’t know that. This guide is bullshitting them. Look, now he’s talking about the ballet instructor in the corner and her nice rack, and how your rack is a national treasure, and you may remember it from such performances as Swan Lake—”

“HEY, STOP TALKING ABOUT MY RACK!” Alice shouted. The tour group turned and looked at them, confused. “Oh shit.” Alice slunk low in her seat and broke into laughter, as did Arturo. She waved them away, and mouthed “Sorry.” The group lost interest. “It wouldn’t have happened if you didn’t lie.”

“I didn’t lie exactly; I might have said my view rather than what he was saying.”

She exhaled. Then laughed again, then fixed his collar. Recently, Alice had a new self-satisfaction, a confidence with him. The kind of domain over him that comes when a woman gets her footing with a man: a boldness, fussing over his appearance. He becomes something of an extension of her being, an accessory associated with her in public and so she must make sure he looks suitable. Something had changed. The change gave her a flattering glow and slight smugness. He felt a corresponding new meekness, his shoulders hunched, and a new impulse to please her with the broad humor that she enjoyed.

Alice was giddy and loose, laughing at whatever he said. Everything in her manners suggested a woman fully in love. This only made Arturo feel worse for not reciprocating the fullness of her emotions, for using her to cushion his heartbreak when Catarina had left him.

He let Alice’s stream of words wash over him, half-focused, until she commented that a job teaching dance had opened back in Santa Fe, if the two of them wanted a break from the City. A place where she could do more than Tchaikovsky, always the Nutcracker in the winter and Swan Lake in the spring like her current job. She described the Tent Rocks and the reservation lands and the dry heat, not humid like New York.

“Why would you mention that?” he asked. “Before, you wanted to move in a year.”

“I wanted you to know there was an opportunity. That’s all, no pressure.”

He let it go, and went back to playing tour guide, this time sharing truthful personal connections to places. He’d lived so many places and held so many jobs that he had something every few blocks: his old car dealership, where he’d squatted, the site of the Triangle Waistcoat Factory fire that his grandmother saw firsthand, radicalizing her. Arturo abruptly fell silent, realizing he was talking with the nostalgia of someone about to leave.

If this silence bothered her, she didn’t indicate. And after a few blocks, she exclaimed: “I know that building, what’s it called?”

“The Flatiron.”

“It’s one of the first I ever saw in New York. Can we go in?”

“I think it is offices inside, but maybe the hotel across the street will give us a view.”

They picked a bottle of wine from a local shop, another extravagance. They went into the hotel lobby, and asked the bellhop if they could rent a room that overlooked Flatiron for a few hours.

“We don’t rent out rooms for an hour. You’ll find plenty of options for that closer to the Deuce.”

“It’s not like that. She’s my wife.”

“Wife?” the bellhop said, looking her over, then him. Neither wore rings.

“Come on, don’t lie,” Alice cut in. “We’re together six months now. That’s true. But he’s trying to be a stupid romantic about something. His grandmother sold flowers in the Flatiron.” This rang truer to the guy, and Alice was someone people seemed to want to please. The bellhop breathed in and out real hard, and they knew they’d be let in.

They got a room that looked over the eastern half of the city to the river, Flatiron included, for a pittance.

Once alone, they found a slightly static classical music station on the room's radio and danced together slowly. Then she found a disco station, and he laid back on the bed and watched her dance on her own as he drank wine. After a few songs, she curled next to him. He offered a glass of wine, which she accepted but then put immediately on the nightstand.

"Water first. I guess I got a little dance practice in after all." She wiped her brow. "How do you feel?"

"I'm a lucky guy."

"You are." She rolled away from him, sat on her knees at the end of the bed and said, "I'm having a hard time with the way you look at Catarina."

"How do I look at her?" Arturo asked.

"How I want you to look at me. You leer at her in a way that leaves nothing left in your body."

"She was my wife." He reflected. "She still is, technically."

She inhaled and exhaled heavily. "And that's the problem, this grey area you've ended up in. You're always thinking of her, and I understand that you're going to be thinking of someone who matters like that, with your history. But I need you back at night when you're coming home to me – present, not just there. In my bed, at dinner. I can't feel like, when I'm pulling you onto the tour bus, that I'm pulling you away from where you really want to be."

He sat up on the bed and loosened his tie and unbuttoned the top button.

"Do you get it? I feel like you enjoy dating me, and that if you keep dating me—that's good, you'll be happy. But that if you stopped dating me that would be okay too. You feel no stakes, you're not afraid of losing me—but I'm afraid of losing you. I'm afraid I *am* losing you."

“You’re not losing—” he said.

“Hold on, I’m not done. If I’m going to lose you, I don’t want to do it in a passive way. I’m going to move on with my life and find someone who can make a relationship a priority because I deserve that, everyone deserves that. And I know you’re not a passive guy. You’re living with me and she has her own man, yet somehow I feel like the mistress and, like you just said, she’s still your wife. Look,”—she laughed bitterly and grabbed a fistful of sheets—“we’re having this conversation in a hotel. And I love watching you interact with my students when you visit the class. You’re going to be such a wonderful father for someone. But imagine our future kids, is this the environment you picture bringing them into? You know?” Her voice cracked. Arturo went to her and kissed her.

“I know,” he said. “I’m sorry. I understand.”

“I’m not going to cry,” she said. She got up, put down the wine she had barely touched and poured herself more water from the ice pitcher. She wiped her brow.

“I’m under a lot of pressure,” he said defensively.

“We’re all under a lot of pressure, Art. How do you think these last few months have been for me? Do you know the pressure I’ve put myself under to be the perfect supportive girlfriend while I’m waiting at home as you go on dates with your ex-wife then you finally come home with your thoughts full of her feelings and say let’s be in a foursome, and I need to navigate how to react. I’ve been going along because I love you, and am fighting so hard for this to work, but do you understand how exhausting that has been for me? I bite my tongue, and anyway if I push you too hard you’ll just balk and go back to her, or not even go to her, but wait for her pathetically. But I’m about at the end of that rope, Art. A woman has limits and I’m not a fool.”

Arturo poured himself more wine, and drank silently, collecting his thoughts. He was surprised to locate real fear of losing Alice. What if this messy timing was his only window to have a shot at someone as loving, beautiful and understanding as Alice?

“Let’s get some air,” he said.

They headed to the balcony. His loosened tie flapped against his chest. The view looked down on the Manhattan skyline and west into the Hudson River. The sun was setting over the Flatiron building, and the briskness of the air now had more bite. They’d need to leave the hotel in an hour or two.

“When Catarina came over a while back,” Alice said, “I raised the idea of her moving in with us, and she brushed it off, and talked about work.”

“What are you saying?” Arturo asked.

“I’m not trying to break you off from your ex-wife, Arturo,” she said, “but Catarina is not going to give you what you want. Do you think that she’ll wake up one day and decide to go public? First the Lucas case required secrecy, now this promotion—there will always be something. Do you really think we’ll all be a family five years from now?”

“No,” Arturo said. Saying this out loud made him feel miserable, like an admission that their attempt to extend and recreate the bond among four people was doomed for failure.

“No! See? She’s going to keep us at a distance. Best case we’re still doing weekend playdates, worst case she kicks us to the curb. And the more I learn, the more maybe having this in the open might not be good for your own career. You work with the same sort of people she’s so worried will find out, something you don’t even seem to ever consider,” Alice said. “I hate seeing you like this. Cat gets everything she wants. She gets to be prim and proper and high society, and wear that cross, but then comes around and slums it with us when she wants fun. You let her. I’m beginning to hate her for how she treats you, for being in your head when you should be moving on.”

“I am moving into a new thing that involves all four of us.” Arturo felt both annoyance with, and admiration for, Alice’s rage. This was an openness that he and Catarina did not possess.

Alice's moods passed in and out like storms, and didn't fester. Her method required a certain vulnerability, a willingness to share moods and reactions.

"Are you? Because I know women, and she's never going to treat you like the husband you were. Let's go. Early on, I didn't feel I had the standing to push back against Catarina getting her way all the time. If I didn't go along, you'd choose her, even if she just had you wait on the sidelines forever. I got you out of your funk after she kicked you to the curb, and you came to me all broken down. Then suddenly Catarina wants to bring everyone together. I thought maybe she had a careful plan, but there wasn't, right? Arturo, I might not be a fancy lawyer like you guys, but I can see what this is. It's time."

"Soon," he said. "I promise. If this doesn't work out."

"Arturo, I know you were married for years and that it hurts you to let go of something special, but it has been long enough. Now, I want to be someone in something special." She gripped his hand so hard he thought she might draw blood. "Hey. Hey! There's a woman right here who is in love with you, who is putting up with more than most women would tolerate." She did draw blood, and would have gone deeper if he hadn't removed the hand.

He instinctively sensed that this was it, her cards on the table. If he said anything but yes, I love you, then she would be out of his life. "You're right," he said hesitantly. He wanted Catarina back more than Alice, but that wasn't an available choice: he could either move forward with Alice or hold onto his delusion that his old connection with Catarina would reappear. Singlehood loomed; he'd be a divorcé, a word that felt pregnant with devastating loneliness.

"I know I'm right," she said firmly. "I say a lot of smart things if you'd listen."

"I love you," he said, relieved to learn that he felt it. Even if 'love' with Alice meant something different than with Catarina: less passionate, more muted. He felt a confusing trace element of paternalism towards her. Still, he loved her, though. He hadn't lied.

Alice looked stunned, then came towards Arturo and kissed him. Her lips were cold from the ice water. "I know. I've known. I felt it in your actions, in your eyes. And I love you too. I've been waiting to say those words for so long, you don't know, but my friends always tell me 'never say it first.' The most important thing to me is that the two of us stay a unit no matter what, that's the first thing for me. The only thing."

"I know," he said. He stroked her face, and felt a little suffocated by her happiness but also glad he'd ended her wait. He had waited for a similar moment of re-commitment from Catarina, and it hadn't come. "I know. I'm sorry this has been so messy." But maybe she was right. Get away from Brooklyn, go to Santa Fe for a fresh start, then figure it all out there. His marriage was gone, his immigration position was gone, his current position felt like a holding pattern. With this decision made, getting out of town felt the cleanest way to let go without backsliding or everything around him reminding him of Catarina.

She walked to the balcony entrance, and leaned against the sliding door's handle, but didn't push it.

He nodded.

She closed her eyes, breathed in heavily, held it and exhaled. Her eyes reopened. "Good. We're fine. You and I." She pushed the sliding door open and reached for him. "Come, touch me."

\* \* \*

Two days later, Arturo visited Catarina. The apartment was empty. Leo was working late and Alice had agreed to let Arturo handle this alone.

While he waited for Catarina, he walked around the apartment, full of a confused sense he was invading privacy in his own apartment. A number of new, nicer items had been added: updated cookware, a nice new sofa and a modern radio that could play cassette tapes. For the first time, Catarina's extravagant vanity didn't look out of place against all the surrounding items.

The whiskey on the dresser was expensive. He set up two double shots on the couch table and waited.

When she came in, she greeted him, whispering that she'd been hoping that he'd make it, she'd had such a long stressful day. Once she removing her outer layers and her earrings, Catarina sat and sipped her whiskey.

He lifted his own whiskey with resignation, shooting the full glass. She spotted his brooding mood. She looked at the glasses with suspicion, tapped the side of her glass and shot it.

When she put it down, he refilled it and his own. He resisted the urge to reassure her this wasn't a breakup conversation. But that's what it was.

"Well, okay, I'll start," he said. "I don't know how much it matters now that it's all done, but I knew that Lucas triplicated before you did. The Barren Brothers told me a recent duplicate needed help, and I visited the flophouse not knowing it was him."

She looked livid. "When exactly was this?"

"October. I don't know the exact date, but after the trial, a few weeks before he got his attorneys."

"How could you not tell me? I was the only thing standing between that boy and a double-digit sentence followed by deportation."

"You're not a judge; you're a prosecutor, and the kid thought I was his defense attorney. And it all worked out."

"Barely, if the kid surfaced a week or two later or if the press had gotten wind first, the case might have been out of my control. Even how things did go down we took a reputational hit. Half the legal community knew before us, even that activist woman Nadia knew before me. I looked bad; the office looked bad. With a few weeks' notice, I could have managed things a lot better."

He tapped his fingernails against the side of his tumbler. "It didn't feel like the right thing.

She rubbed her temples. “Fine. I’m overreacting; I can see how that could have been a hard position. Where you draw moral lines are just confusing sometimes. I thought we shared everything, and figured out what to do together.”

He looked away. “That kid had such a stupid plan, thinking he’d raise his hand and say ‘double jeopardy,’ and Judge Fox would just let him walk.”

She laughed at the image. “Judge Fox would have . . . I don’t even know.”

He stood and turned his back to her. “Alice wants to go back to Santa Fe. She got a job offer. We’re going to go.”

She drank. The assumed power she was used to having was lost. “I don’t think you should do that.” A confused panic surfaced, an unexpected fear of losing him.

“Why?” he asked.

“You didn’t want to move to Philly.” Alice, on her first swing, got him to return to her hometown.

“Why shouldn’t I leave Brooklyn?” he repeated.

“Why now, when I’m finally feeling a little comfort around this. Why not leave me a long time ago?” she asked.

“Some nights you’re a hundred percent present, and it’s lovely. And some nights I don’t hear from you. Sometimes I feel like your husband, others like a backdoor man. If we stay, will that change? Can you offer that? Are we going to have a true, open partnership with the four of us getting what we need?”

She said nothing and avoided his eyes.

“Well, anyway, we’ll go soon. Before the new year.”

“You know I can’t offer all that, Arturo. You know I want to say yes, but that’s not how the world works.”

He agreed, and left soon after.

\* \* \*

In the week that followed, the two couples didn't see much of each other. Logistics were made between Art and Leo planning divisions of money and belongings. The task was a misery; they wanted all the same items. Temporary decisions regarding belongings that Arturo kept at Alice's became permanent. Arturo left any items deeply connected with the marriage, which excluded most items. Days later, Leo shared that Alice had given him a collection of nude photos that a photographer friend had taken of her across the years, with a dated inscription: "Arturo doesn't need these. Perhaps it will remind you." This covert act caused more jealousy than all their trysts. Catarina couldn't help asking to look, even though seeing Alice's body across years worsened Catarina's insecurities. Sensual rather than pornographic, the black and white photos captured Alice in moments of stark vulnerability. Still, the remembrance gift carried underneath it a taunt and retaliation against both Catarina and Leo.

The day before the move, Leo shared that he and Catarina would be using the same moveout date. They had found a place in Brooklyn Heights, a few blocks from the Promenade, and a fifteen-minute bike-ride to work for each. They'd own a two-bedroom co-op in a brownstone. This would involve loans, but they'd gotten it done.

On moving day, Leo and Arturo carted down boxes to Alice's Pontiac while Alice remained in the car to make sure nothing was stolen. Catarina wasn't present until the end, at Arturo's request, but had already set aside everything important to her. When she did show up, her face was puffy from crying. Nobody wanted the hands sculpture made for Alice's show. Catarina had always disliked it, and after Alice understood its history, she'd didn't want to bring that kind of symbol. In the end, they left it in the burned-out window of the nearby abandoned gas station. The last thing they did was sign legal papers, including a quit-claim between Arturo and Leo dividing property and

divorce papers between Arturo and Catarina. The divorce was based on abandonment and was designed to be finalized a year after Catarina initially moved out.

The large moving truck Leo had rented still had plenty of space when they finished, as except for Catarina's vanity, and recent purchases (including the mattress bought following the blackout), they'd decided the time had come to junk all the old furniture.

Alice's Pontiac, by contrast, seemed overflowing—every inch was stuffed with kitchen items, art pieces and clothing. In fact, they took little. It was just a small car.

## Chapter Eleven

On Tuesday, February 8, 1978, Catarina woke up alone to the clock-radio in their new Brooklyn Heights apartment.

Waking alone when she expecting his body created a wave of confusion and loneliness, but he'd been heading out early for work, so she was growing more accustomed to the sensation and shook it off. Their walls were still mostly blank—they'd thrown out their old things without replacing them, and so the bedroom was slow to develop the lived-in feel of their prior spaces.

She pulled back the heavy drapes. They had a window that looked out over the NYC skyline, and a quick glance suggested that the snowfall the night before hadn't let up. Everything was thickly blanketed.

The newscast was discussing the tractorcade of a thousand striking farmers who had driven to DC to protest the Farm Bill. Weeks ago, their tractors had been trapped on the National Mall by local police. Now, in response to the snow, the farmers were destroying wooden benches and cutting down trees along the Mall for a bonfire to keep warm. The newscaster then listed out local school closures names and announced bus and train service was now suspended. The severity of the blizzard sunk in—and she considered that she might be trapped apart from Leo if he'd left for work early.

Catarina ran down the stairs (they now had stairs! Their space was too big).

Leo was there, working at their kitchen table, looking up at her rush in confusion.

“The news said the snow got bad,” she said.

“That's right,” he confirmed. “Word is that half the City's snow plows don't even work. So, home office today. I made coffee.” He studied her eyes and lips. “You okay?”

She was breathing heavily, feeling relief and embarrassment. “I had a bad moment when you weren't there when I woke. I'm fine now.”

“I’m here,” he said gently. He stood, squeezed her arm, then wandered around the marble island separating their living room and kitchen space, the boundary also marked by a shift from wood flooring to the kitchen’s yellow and white linoleum.

She accepted coffee, and sat on a stool in front of the marble island. The room was cold. The living room had exposed brick covered with mirrors and a giant triangle macramé knot. Past the dining table was a new plush couch, glass table and a wicker bar-cart full of wines and spirits.

“I did actually call car service to see if some intrepid soul might brave the weather for a little extra. I could probably expense it for this one, but they weren’t even open.”

“Is that right? You hadn’t even been in a taxi when I met you,” she said. “Now look at you. Expensing.”

He grinned. “Remember that shabby jacket? With the disintegrating lining?”

“I can’t believe you kept that coat so long. I was embarrassed for you. What happened to that ratty thing?” His absence of shame—or awareness of the perception he was evoking—had been refreshing and disconcerting.

“During law school a homeless man over by Columbus Circle saw me wearing it, and said ‘hey man, you’ve got my coat.’ That’s when I knew it was time to get a new coat.”

She sipped her coffee, and took note of the financing documents splayed out on the dining table. A conglomerate’s ownership was represented by an octopus of interconnected blocks, with the center of each containing names like *Cutiraba Holding Co. IV, a Delaware corporation*. Also set up on the table set up was a fancy office phone that allowed conference calls.

She hadn’t brought work home, meaning that for the first time in ages, she had no pressing task to complete. “Maybe we could have a real snow day, ignore work,” she suggested. “I feel like we haven’t gotten to speak so much since they left.” Arturo and Alice had barely been mentioned since the departure. “Or we could go back to the bedroom and not speak.”

Leo winced. “I wish,” he said, pulling eggs from the fridge, lighting gas under the cast iron and toasting bread in fluid motions. “I have to get back to it after we eat. Hopefully after this deal goes through things will slow down for a while. It’s just a crucial time.”

She nodded slowly, though his back was to her. “It’s okay. You don’t have to tell me about being busy,” she said. “What are you working on that’s so urgent?”

He cracked eggs into the pan and they sizzled. “Fittingly, we’re working on the New York City Loan Guarantee Bill that’s floating through Congress. The task is begging Congress to guarantee City debt so she could take out bonds and loans with paying usury interest rates, possibly set up critical short-term borrowing to get New York an infusion of cash to get back on her feet—or at least some new snow plows. We’re representing the City, and drafting their preferred model financial documents that can be appended to the bill.”

“Huh,” she said. “Sounds like you’re getting good assignments. Still working for that guy?”

“Abe? Yeah. Our relationship seems to have slowly evolved into something between servile, paternal, and a fraternal wartime bond.”

He was looking at her now, and she raised her eyebrow.

“Strange, right? I always thought when I met a real millionaire,” he continued, “he’d have a top hat and a monocle. Rich people are less evil than I expected—and more stressed. Abe seems driven by a sense of almost civic obligation—a fear that if he doesn’t give his self over to the job then the world economy might collapse. He talks about the ‘economy’ like it’s a real breathing thing that needs caretakers.”

“That’s . . . grandiose.”

“Yes, and yet the more I work with him—the more I think he might be right. He was in the room representing the City when the pension funds saved us from filing for bankruptcy in '75. And

as painful as the last few years have been limping with a wounded economy—the whole thing could have been much worse.”

She accepted a plate of eggs and buttered bread. He sat the stool next to her, putting his plate on the kitchen island. Up close, the bags under his eyes made him look old.

“Do you like finance law?” she asked.

“It’s a new language, but I’m slowly learning to speak,” he said, swallowing eggs, wiping his mouth, then moving his plate aside and grabbing his yellow notepad. “Something that’s hot right now is they talk a lot about a capital formation crisis—which I’d heard about in the news but never understood.” He drew a line graph with tax revenue on one axis and tax rate on the other, then drew a bell curve. “This is called the Laffer Curve. On one end if the government charges no taxes, then you get zero revenue. On the other end of the axis if you charge 100% in taxes, you’ll also get zero dollars in revenue—people won’t work if someone is going to take all their money. That means there’s a point somewhere on the curve where taxing at higher rate causes revenue to peak, then taxing more causes revenue to go down. If current tax rates are higher than that peak, that means you can actually increase government revenue by lowering taxes.”

“Are taxes now higher than that peak?” she asked, pointing at the zenith of the bell curve.

“Nobody knows,” he confessed, “but with capital gains taxes specifically some smart people think if you lower the rate then more people will invest—which will lower inflation and increase job growth. Plus, people who save money will reinvest, and those investments will stimulate the economy and generate more taxes down the line.”

“Isn’t this all a Reagan talking point?” She took on a faux-Reagan folksy style. “Lower taxes are good because people don’t bury the extra cash in a tin can in their backyards, but invest in things that create jobs that can then also be taxed.”

“These are smart people who understand finance.”

“Smart people with strong incentives to rationalize.”

“You don’t buy it?” he said, deflated.

“If Duncan was pulling money from the stock market, it wasn’t to reinvest. He needing cash for some big purchase. If he’d wanted to invest in something, he’d just invest in it. Maybe on the edges taxes influence how he’d structure the transaction, but there’s better ways to stimulate the economy than giving rich people more money. You of all people know that.”

He tapped his pad tentatively. “Huh,” he finally said.

“Leo, are you becoming Republican?” she asked. “It’s okay if you are. I just want to understand what all this adds up to.”

He laughed, put the pad down and returned to his breakfast. “The toughest test was actually my first paycheck, when I saw how much they took out, but I passed.”

“I’m serious. I don’t know if you realize how you sound. This time last year you wouldn’t shut up about the tractorcade and labor solidarity, and now I only realized that strike’s happening again this year from the snowstorm report.”

He looked at her awkwardly, confused. “No, I . . . no. I’m not becoming Republican.”

Her finger traced up and down his bell curve drawing—then traced his drawing of a mountain doodled on the white of the binding at the top of the sketchbook. “Leo, I get what you’re going through more than most. I went through the same thing when I went from Philly to the Ivy League—you absorb ideas around you out of a survival instinct,” she said. “You’re having fun rubbing shoulders with power, but that doesn’t mean you’re one of them.”

“Cat, you asked about finance, I only brought it up as an example of talk at work.”

She put his hand on his knee and smiled at him. He gave her neck a massage with one hand in response. “I’m not upset—I’m making a broader point. You *should* hide your true views at work, including agreeing the Laffer Curve is sound or in the existence of a capital formation crisis. They’re

waiting for any tells that reveal your background as a poor Brooklyn boy without the correct pedigree to be in that room. The people at the top were sculpted from birth with the right manners, the correct ideas, the confidence, the charm. They make you feel like they aren't greedy while making millions. But underneath, at the same time, you keep your values, so you don't lose yourself in the process. That's the way you survive those spaces."

Leo removed his hand from her neck and leaned back, as if frightened of her emotion—pushing against the marble kitchen island as if for support. "Perhaps there's something to that. My officemate Sonny acts like the job is bullshit, but he also has the air of someone who has never once in his life failed at anything or even had to worry about failure. Even if he lost his job, he could go work for his father's hedge fund." He tilted his head to the side. "But I also think you're sounding a little paranoid? The idea of never sharing my politics at work, or being super-guarded with someone like Sonny doesn't sound helpful either."

"Leo. You do have to be guarded—they'll use your work and praise you, but your place in their world isn't secure—because some ingrained part of them thinks we're . . . sullyng their pedigree with our presence. I learned this at my first wedding. Duncan's mother told me that no matter how she acted in public, I'd never be a member of the family. That's their true face. I've watched it play out again and again. What happened to Maddie, because she couldn't conform, Arturo not getting the job at Winthrop Ashe."

He looked skeptical. "Trust me a little as a judge of character. Not everyone is your WASPy ex-mother-in-law. Unlike Sonny, this is my first success breaking into this kind of upper echelon, and I need to make real relationships to work well—and I can't do that without being myself."

The phone rang, interrupting them, and Leo headed to the table and picked up before the third ring.

"Hello?" he asked

“ . . . ”

“No, I haven’t spoken to Abe. Okay, hold on.” Leo looked up at Catarina apologetically, and she smiled and stood, and busied herself removing the breakfast plates to the sink.

He put the call on speaker—freeing his hands to pick up a yellow notepad and flip through it. “What’s the word?”

“The fun gossip. Out of spite several of the Mayor Koch’s political enemies’ blocks are being saved until last,” Sonny’s disembodied voice said.

Leo laughed warmly. Catarina could tell it was forced, but still the sound cut her to hear given their budding fight. “That’s not surprising,” Leo said. “Found Abe’s home number. Conferencing Abe in now.”

There was the sound of ringing. A woman’s voice picked up. Leo said who they were. A pause followed.

“Don’t you know you’re killing him?” she said. “How dare you call on a day like today. His doctor said he needs rest, and you never give him a moment—”

The clicking sound of another phone being lifted followed, along with some kind of clanking ruckus in the background. “Betsy is this for me?”

“—never any rest. His heart—”

“Hi Abe,” Leo said.

“Betsy please hang up,” Abe said. “I’ve got it.”

The clicking sound of phone disconnecting followed. “Sorry about that. My heart is perfectly solid. The kids are falling apart with the excitement of the snow day.” His voice grew distant.

“Please keep it down while daddy speaks to his friends? Go downstairs to your mother. I’ll be down in a minute.”

As they turned to financing documents, Catarina felt guilt for eavesdropping and headed back upstairs to their study—which, like their bedroom, had a view of the snowy Manhattan skyline.

If Abe had school-age children this was likely a second wife. She imagined Leo aging into Abe in a scenario in which Leo did succeed in moving up the partnership ladder. Perhaps her hectoring him with his own old politics had been a cover for some other, deeper anxiety—a sense she was unexpectedly losing him in a quicksand of workaholism. She loved the attentive-lover and potential-good-father version of him, and now the value she'd spotted in him as a car salesman was being repurposed as a cog in the global financial apparatus (at her own encouragement). Her Pygmalion sculpting had backfired.

A fissure that had been growing for some time became clear—she'd been too busy to notice until then. A half-forgotten loneliness resurfaced—one that used to come in waves while Duncan was away on business trips. Once, while Duncan was away, the chandelier in their Upper East Side bathroom had crashed just a few feet from her as she shut the sliding shower door. Her arms clung to the his-and-hers shower towels with their initials embroidered on them and she cried in the shower stall. For days afterwards, she feared that she'd be crippled by some other domestic danger and nobody would find her until too late—a fear that Duncan wasn't equipped to assuage from a hotel far away. Instead, he howled about the contractor who installed the chandelier, who he would sue into oblivion. Recalling that lonely ache had helped give her the resolve to leave Duncan for Leonard when the choice came.

\* \* \*

In the weeks that followed the snowstorm, Catarina found herself missing the abundant emotional connection she'd recently felt smothered by. With Leo working so much often, she poured herself into her own new responsibilities. What should have been an exciting promotion already felt mundane, disengaged, and without much meaning. On the other hand, the long hours

allowed her to repress the loss of Arturo and an era of her life. The task required full focus to do well, and more could always be done. Assigned to a complex racketeering case right away, she spent her time sitting in a sparsely furnished “War Room” with stacks of evidence, a typewriter, and several junior prosecutors she didn’t care to get to know tabbing exhibits and making binders. She’d gotten accustomed to taking work home to their annex. Even her shared time with Leo felt like empty calories because they were sleep-deprived and unfocused on each other.

So often he intuitively knew Catarina’s needs better than she did, but right now he didn’t seem to hear her. Events had distorted the signal: the split, the foursome, his lost odd kinship with his other self, now his new employment. She tried being there for him like he’d done for her by not being a burden, keeping the fridge full of food, being available when he had time, and not getting upset at cancelled plans. He was working a job that required primacy as the price of admission. She knew about that. She caught him once in the kitchen, coming home late—he was eating ice cream using a cookie as a spoon. She considered he’d duplicated again, and this was him making up the calories. But, no, it was only one Leo—sleep-deprived and burning out, with no willpower left over to make a reasonable meal. She turned around back up the stairs, leaving him to it

To his credit, he seemed aware they were going through something, and was trying to help them. Yet, his gestures didn’t work. He hired a cleaning lady, but this actually worsened matters, sweeping away what little untidiness now accumulated; though she had no grounds to reject the gesture given how long she’d been a scold. Yet, even the absence of Leo’s messiness, his least desirable habit, made her feel less of *him* was there—a missing smell. His one attempt to reform their bond through sex was similarly disastrous: surprising her with a suction dildo placed on a mirror, creating a phantom second couple that evoked more sadness than eros. His cock, usually a willing soldier, remained ropey, semi-present. The dildo disappeared afterwards and was never mentioned again. Their signals to and from each other were broken.

She wept at Arturo's first contact: a letter to her workplace for her birthday apologizing for breaking his vow (made in his early twenties when he barely knew her) to be at all future birthdays. The typeface was unfamiliar, different from his standard typewriter which was in their new basement, but the words were distinctly his old self. He wrote about how Catarina had raised his standards for what he could feel for someone, which made it tough to open up again to someone new.

At first, Catarina resisted writing back, thinking even a simple, "Thank you" might confuse things.

But a few days later, a little tipsy, she did write back. She said she wanted to know everything about his new life in Santa Fe, but she only allowed herself three paragraphs, one of thanks, one of what was going on, and one with some basic questions about where they were living, if Alice was treating him well. She closed the letter, "I miss you terribly and wish I could come up with something that didn't feel sneaky or make me feel guilty about the whole situation, and yet our ending didn't feel final. So, I don't know where to go from here."

He wrote again, and she wrote again, each time to their new place in Brooklyn Heights. She hadn't told Leo that this was happening. Presumably Arturo was taking the same risk and she didn't want to acknowledge that they were sliding into something illicit. And so, she lived with the anxiety.

She allowed herself to give him more extensive updates. She told him about preparation for upcoming trials and new responsibilities, and how Leo was working all the time, and how things with Maddie had been frosty since O'Donnell had been pushed out. She included a raw confession that she feared part of her paranoia over being outed as having two husbands was an often self-defeating, sense of self-preservation she'd had since childhood. She didn't know what else to add, but kept adding redundant points. What if this was the last letter, the end to their exchanges?

Leo was so closed off at the moment, hard to speak with, facing a steep learning curve at the new job. She told Arturo “you’re in the other room in a brooding mood. Sorry—is it weird when I say it like that?”

He wrote back,

It’s fine to hear about Leo. It’s like hearing about me as a character in a dull story. Even if I don’t get to really live it, there’s something comforting in hearing about your life with him. Our strange situation is even denying me the bitter comfort that most spurned lovers can fall back on: that the woman you lost would have been happier with you; that she’s going to look back with regret on the cold nights.

What I fear the most is a future where we’re no longer talking, and I am married again, and you have a daughter, and I have a daughter, and I think of you. I imagine that there is still some chance even then, that I have you or can get you. But my rational mind storms in, and I’m hit with the reality of the impossible distance between us.

Right now, though, I am hoping it is not too late and I still have the opportunity to search within myself for the words that would reunite us. I’ve tried “I am in love with you” and I have tried “until death do us part” and I have tried “you are beautiful and the four of us together can last” and I now wonder if I need to say these same words with a new inflection—that the words are the right ones but the moment was not right yet to win your heart back completely.

Catarina, watching the riots, the night with the bat foolishly protecting bikes, watching the city die, the grit of the past year constantly reminded me that we are terribly mortal and we are going to die, someday, and so we need to squeeze out as much life as we can while there’s time. You were my chance for true love. You bring life into my life. I want to be near you every moment. I am not the past. I am a flesh and blood man who still loves you—who is ready to continue his life with you. We can be permanent. You just have to take me.

In all of this, it is not lost on me that in our marriage we had a larger portion of beauty than most anybody gets in a full life, and I can never lose that.

In her letter responding to this one, she confessed that she’d applied for, and didn’t get, the job at the Brooklyn USA attorney’s office, the position that he’d recommend she put her name in for shortly before the duplication. This was a secret that Leo still didn’t know. For some reason, she’d always had trouble confessing to Leo or Arturo when she failed at things. She wanted to preserve his awe. She loved his awe.

As though a flood in him were opened, more letters followed, progressively more emotional. He would say desperately romantic, passionate things, evoking a mix of pleasure and warmth, guilt and self-loathing. He complained of the smallness of the city (less than 50,000!), the difficulty getting Italian or remotely ethnic ingredients, how everything moved slower, but praised the friendliness, safety (local kids playing in streets after dark, people leaving cars unlocked) and affordability. He liked the dry heat and the adobe houses, and said that air conditioning was becoming more common—which many predicted would lead to a population boom.

They spoke of reuniting the four of them in vague timelines, and how that might look: them all in a single space somewhere between Santa Fe and Brooklyn, in a small Americana town. Since before she left Duncan, they'd always daydreamed futures together; she'd pose ideas, weigh his responses, feel loved when he played along even with absurd life scenarios. This let her feel into what dreams she wanted to live out as they laid out together, and she knew he felt the same rush of limitless possibility. These dreaming sessions enabled them to negotiate her getting divorced with a comforting level of abstraction, by discussing the distant future instead of immediate steps: her willingness to give up the extravagant lifestyle Duncan provided, his willingness to meet her in the middle. Their dreams created no firm commitments and always contained elements of delusion, describing fanciful futures they'd love but were improbable. But now, with Arturo in Santa Fe and her in New York, the dreams existed as a different sort of delusion; futures they both knew with certainty wouldn't come. The drug-like high that came from writing out these new dreams of a shared future came with a cost, a rough hangover when she crashed to Earth each time the reality outside their correspondence intruded. They were moving apart rapidly, with Leo's new position changing her lifestyle. Arturo talked like he was planting roots, considering building his own home. Each day they were further, not closer to a reunion.

And each time Arturo's communications arrived, her day would be thrown off. In time the pleasure she got from the letters lessened, his messages tinged with an element of delusion. When she felt guilty for reopening the door, she responded curtly. His outpouring tipped from romantic to worrisome. He once tried to call her five times in a twenty-minute span. Her secretary Daisy, who still didn't know there were two of them, must have thought her husband had become a dangerous stalker.

He sent a giant landscape painting by a Santa Fe artist—the shipping alone must have been outrageous. She refused to open the hefty crate it arrived in until he described the painting in detail. She'd had the paranoid thought that he'd decided to shame her by sending some explicit rendition of their orgy. But it was exactly what he described, a desert landscape – too large to fit in her office (which she now shared with an officemate she was less comfortable with than Maddie) and not at all befitting A.D.A. work. She left it in the corner for weeks.

She plowed into work to avoid mourning or accepting reality. Maddie called, saying Arturo had been leaving messages, and asked what Catarina wanted her to say. Anger flared inside Catarina at Arturo involving Maddie in this, but she suppressed it.

“Tell him you'd be a bad friend if you suggested he hold out hope,” Catarina said.

“Is that the truth?” Maddie asked.

“That's the truth. I'm happy with just me and Leo.”

There was a pause.

“What about us?” Catarina asked.

“Home and I are going to take a bike ride across America once the weather warms, sell our things, maybe look for jobs out west. Start with San Francisco. Home has a connection with Harvey Milk that might be able to get me something law-adjacent.”

“Home's quitting her teaching job? I thought she had a great, secure position.”

“Academia’s a snakepit, just like the law.”

“Why leave?”

“It’s because I lost my job, and the City just doesn’t feel welcoming anymore.”

“You’ll get another job. The City’s desperate for talent. I’m sorry if the business with Arturo made the city seem less welcome.”

“Believe it or not, it’s not about you. It’s the unrest, the boarded-up stores,” Maddie said, her affect dull. She exhaled heavily. “Look, I appreciate the job leads you’ve been mailing and the care package Leo sent. But I’ve got my own life, and I don’t know if I even want to be a lawyer anymore.”

“You’re such a great lawyer. Don’t let them win!”

The line went silent.

“I thought you hated biking,” Catarina said to get Maddie speaking again.

“I hate biking in the city because it’s so unsafe, but I love biking. The highways will take some getting used to,” Maddie said. “Look, I’ve got to go. We’ll be doing a small going away thing. I’ll keep you posted.”

“I look forward to hearing all about the trip, the planning, everything.”

“Sure,” Maddie said. “Bye.”

That evening, Catarina penned a letter asking him to stop, to move on, to be happy and fair to lovely Alice. *I’ve been greedy, and the consequences of that are what I need to live with. This is what my heart wants, what feels right, and it’s not orgies and play and experimenting and we just hope that society gets more accepting. I want a husband who gets all of me. That’s what we all deserve, and I can’t give that to two of you and Alice.* She feared what it would mean if Arturo didn’t comply—what it would say about the man

who she was still with, since her remaining husband could become this man. She didn't send this letter.

Instead, underdressed for the winter evening, Catarina went out and called him from a pay phone.

"I got your letter," Catarina said. "Your wrist must be tired, writing so much." She fiddled with the payphone's armored cord as if it was a string of rosary beads.

"Oh?" he said, sounding hopeful and fearful.

"I thought we agreed to move on."

"I didn't think everything would be so permanent."

She cried. "Us being in touch like this makes a sham of what I am attempting to accomplish with Leo. But I also miss you and want to hold you," she said. "I wish I could say yes and come running but I can't and this needs to end. I'm sorry to do this, Arturo."

"My name is Leonard," he said, reclaiming his old name.

"Leonard, of course. But I think I need to ask you now not to contact me for a time. Maybe I can visit after we've all had some time to work through things. Do you understand? Do you understand why?"

Silence followed.

"Please say something," she said.

"I don't think that's good for either of us,"

"I need you to trust me that I know my own needs." She was crying, and her throat was dry and uncomfortable. "I'll always love you," Catarina said. "If you ever need anything from us."

"Then be with me. That's what I need," Arturo said.

"Art—Leonard, you're starting to scare me," she said, as she was speaking an automated voice came on and robotically asked for more change for the next five minutes.

“I’m what?”

“Hold on, fuck,” she fumbled with her purse and found a nickel and a quarter.

“Are you there?” she asked.

“I’m here.”

“I said, you’re starting to scare me. I’m setting a boundary that I thought we’d already set.

And I need you to respect it and you’re not doing that.”

“Yeah. Yeah, look I’m sorry about all that. I just don’t know how to let go.”

“I know.”

“Okay.”

They were silent for a time, and she realized she was out of change if their time ran out again.

“I’m going to hang up now. Do you have anything else you would like to say before I do?”

“I love you.”

“I love you too.”

“That’s all. Just I love you.”

“I love you too.”

“Goodbye, Catarina.”

“Goodbye, Leonard.”

\* \* \*

She went home and looked at Leo, reading about bankruptcy law on the couch, examining him for traces of the man who she’d been on the phone with.

She felt the confused combination of mourning his absence, feeling his pain, and gratefulness at having him right there. She imagined sending Alice a manual on how to deal with his periods of withdrawal, his unreliability in telling her when she was hurting him, that he sometimes

deflected serious conversations with jokes or sweet, silent gestures. *Stick with him*, she would say. *Be direct*. She laughed bitterly to herself.

She didn't hear from Santa Fe again until the eve of a complex embezzlement trial.

While she was finalizing evidence, working late, surrounded by junior prosecutors, Daisy arrived with a message from Leo: *Alice is pregnant*.

Catarina's hand went to her womb, feeling a visceral absence, as though a child meant to be there had been snatched and placed in Alice's womb. Loss briefly overwhelmed her thoughts.

"Do you need a minute?" a junior prosecutor asked. He must have noticed her look.

"Let's continue," she said, and worked several more hours.

\* \* \*

Her increased job responsibilities in the new racketeering division had in its busy, indifferent way succeeded where the Catholic Church, social mores and her mother had all failed. Simply by keeping her focused and busy, she'd been distracted during a crucial window of time. The many eyes watching her every hour, the need to prepare—none of it allowed for reflection. Alice and Arturo were becoming established, they were moving on. The choice was made and the hard part was done. Inertia was powerful. Nevertheless, she often recalled the busy emotional noise of the summer and autumn: the unpredictable rollercoaster of emotions; Alice's helping her select an outfit with tenderness. Ironically, with Leo submerged in long hours at his new job, she longed for the same heavy attention that had caused her to feel suffocated. She envied herself from months ago.

Still, she'd done what was needed to save the marriage that remained. More accurately, she'd done nothing and let the hard decision be made for her. Now, she wasn't letting Arturo go back on his wise decision. Best to hold the line. Best not to backslide and go through it all again.

## **PART FOUR: 1979**

### **Chapter One**

The visit to Santa Fe didn't happen until October '79, for Arturo and Alice's wedding.

By that point, Arturo and Alice already had fraternal twins.

Catarina and Leo were to arrive a week before the wedding to catch up.

Everyone on the flight seemed to be smoking constantly, which caused Catarina to crave it since she was struggling to quit again. Leo spent most of the flight going through the Barren Brothers' estate documents. He and Arturo did pro bono adjustment work for new duplicates, and the freak show pair had served as a conduit. On their death, he'd been entrusted with stacks of media reports and research papers along with the list of names they'd claimed to Arturo didn't exist: every duplicate who had ever approached them and left information. Using these and available government statistics, the duplicate community believed that the rate of incidence was cyclical but accelerating, with another large spike likely soon.

While reading on the couch the week before, Leo removed his glasses and suggested, almost business-like, that Catarina might have "time alone" with Arturo, and Leo with Alice, but not all four.

"Why are you suddenly prudish?" Catarina had teased, but Leo seemed uneasy and so she didn't push. If Alice suggested some games, then Leo would loosen and perhaps rejuvenate Catarina and Leo's own sex life—which had suffered due to work schedules, stress and the long shadow of the duplication.

Catarina wanted to rekindle something with Arturo, something in the open that left things warmer than that phone call, but knew doing so was unwise. If they all tried again, there might be bitterness rather than the exuberance of something new. Still, in quiet moments since the pair had

left, Catarina allowed herself to daydream about the four reuniting, sometimes on a farm—or some liberal rural enclave like where Alice had once lived—sometimes in Brooklyn.

Even if new games didn't happen in Santa Fe, Catarina was happy they were coming together again.

Stepping off the plane onto the runway, the desert air provided a dry heat sometimes interrupted by cool fall gusts. Arturo and Alice met them on the runway—something impossible to imagine in New York or Philly. This permissiveness gave Santa Fe welcoming but provincial feel. With them were their twins Phillip and Lisa. Both babies looked like Leo: the thick nose and soulful eyes, but not like she'd imagined Leo's first child. She was looking for herself in their faces; that's what was missing.

Alice looked more muscular, a little sleep-deprived. Her hair hung all the way to her hips. Arturo looked completely changed—a full but scraggly salt-and-pepper beard. He looked more Sicilian, and had a new sandy odor and coarseness to his skin. By contrast, Leo had the paleness of someone spending long hours under florescent lights. He'd gained ten pounds since joined the firm. Catarina was so accustomed to seeing Leo out of shape that Arturo looked like his younger version. Her own skin was currently closer in hue to Leo's. This created an unexpected link to Leo and separation from Arturo.

Arturo's hug felt welcoming and familiar. Alice looked more distant and distracted by the kids, fiddling with their clothing, rechecking their seatbelts, and cleaning food from their face. The children themselves seemed indifferent to the reunion.

On the ride home, Alice sat little Phillip on Catarina's lap. Something felt passive aggressive in the act, a way for Alice to show off her motherhood. From the front, beneath round Janis Joplin

glasses, Alice said, “A baby in your lap looks like the most natural thing in the world. He’s so happy with his aunt.”

“How was the pregnancy?” Catarina asked.

“Great,” Alice said. “I didn’t experience those fun symptoms people talk about. Not during the pregnancy at least.”

Her breasts had been tender and swollen, and she had sensed a space in her belly that was no longer her own, belonging instead to two strangers she would meet only later. This inspired a different awareness of her body, of what she ate and drank, and of being present inside a body next to Arturo. “The biggest change is your body isn’t exactly your own anymore. Arturo started making this lovely moonshine but once you’re pregnant your life is centered on *them*.”

“I’ve heard that,” Catarina said. She instinctually pressed a hand into the side of her stomach, imagining what it might feel like for a part of herself that was not herself to pulse. Leo was focused on the children in the car, two purple half-moon bags under his eyes. He didn’t look like someone ready to share the responsibility for young children.

“After the pregnancy was another story,” Alice added, launching into an uncomfortable degree of detail about her pelvic floor and postpartum incontinence, and then moved on to each child’s poop; one’s was more liquid than the other’s. This had worried Alice because she had a friend whose kid had early health problems. These stories ruined Catarina’s anticipation of sex games. Within Catarina’s disappointment was also self-judgment of her own presumptuousness.

“I’m sorry,” Catarina said out loud accidently.

Alice gave her a confused look.

“The incontinence,” Catarina said clumsily.

“Oh, the doctor said it’s normal,” Alice said.

Arturo brushed crumbs from her son’s cheek while he sat on Catarina’s lap.

Alice's younger sister took the toddlers off their hands when they arrived at Alice and Arturo's place.

"Children are exhausting. You'll see," Alice said, her boundless energy sapped as her sister drove off.

The house was one-story with a wrap-around porch. They had a low red fence surrounded by a lawn and driveway. Outside were desert willow trees with pink blooming flowers, and a tire swing large enough for two. Sections of more used tires were used to mark off a garden full of flowers, sage, rosemary and peppers. Keller and Chance, two rescue Labradors, ran around excited too, not sure why they were excited.

Inside was smaller than the photos and descriptions had implied, though still spacious by New York standards. Stacks of books and stray shirts were all over the floor, a deodorant stick on the living room table—a return to the messy state Leonard lived in when they first met.

Arturo walked Catarina to the living room while Leo and Alice went to the kitchen. The walls were lined with shelves musty books, kids' toys, and board games. On a coffee table was the *Whole Earth Catalogue* opened to a page about geodesic domes and a local history of the dust bowl.

Arturo recounted the past two years, barely meeting Catarina's eyes: Alice's family owned the land, and they had saved money by living in a trailer, and slowly built the place. The construction wasn't done, and the trailer was still the only place with air conditioning, so Alice had often retreated there during the pregnancy. The swing in the tree was the last addition.

This last detail stung. A tire swing for two had been a dream of Catarina's since childhood, except her version came complete with apple tree, malamute and a house with a chimney—probably the '50s white American ideal instilled by her mother.

Arturo pulled out a bottle of unlabeled clear liquid from a sawdusty shelf. While accepting the drink, Catarina stepped on something solid and felt it crush easily beneath her foot. She picked up a smushed plastic-snouted pink animal head. Arturo laughed. “Don’t worry, it’s from an already thoroughly dismantled Hungry Hungry Hippos game.” He pointed at a worn, cracked tabletop. “The game was a gift but the twins are too young, so we just took out the marbles and let the kids at it.”

She gave him a bemused smile. “Are those bits of popcorn?”

“One of the kids’ favorite games is Alice will take the lid off the popcorn machine and let the kernels pop out all over the floor. The kids chase them and stuff pieces into their mouths.”

“So, Alice is still inventing games,” Catarina said, “but now they’re toddler-appropriate?”

“Something like that,” Arturo said.

“You have a good life here,” Catarina said, sitting down. Alice and Leo were speaking in the next room, but Catarina resisted the temptation to listen. She sipped her drink—strong, floral, not unpleasant.

“Come see the solar panel,” Arturo said.

Reluctantly, she stood again. Arturo had an eager energy absent from her Leo lately. The garden was lush. A stray garden glove was marked with a sharpie-drawn smile that evoked the face Alice used to draw on her shoulder. This constancy evoked an odd nostalgia, recalling a quirk Catarina had always thought limited Alice’s ability to be taken seriously. Next to a propane tank, they had one refrigerator-sized solar panel, which she’d heard of but never seen. He brushed mud from the top.

“Just like Carter on the White House roof,” Catarina said, picturing TV reports about how solar panels would heat water in the Oval Office’s kitchen.

“Exactly. Until that you didn’t hear about solar much, but they’ve actually been around.”

The panel was rusted and cracked. Catarina laughed without knowing why. “A friend gave us the panel for free for some help on their house,” Arturo said. “He swears that in the summer our electric bill will be cut in half.”

“You’ve gone full hippie,” Catarina said, touching the panel. Something, perhaps his pride in the cracked solar panel, suggested Alice and Arturo still fretted about money in a way that she and Leo didn’t any longer. Both couples were doing better than the Spanish Harlem days, but Arturo’s ascent had halted when they reached the property owning middle-class. Everything hinted at frugality: from their homemade shelves to mismatching kitchenware. Catarina felt torn between guilt for making Arturo start over, and envy of the life they’d created.

The screen door opened from the kitchen, and two dogs came rushing out, Keller stopping to sniff at Catarina and lick her hand. “A zoo!” Alice said, a disembodied voice from the kitchen. Chance rushed into the yard, picked up a dog toy and ran in circles. After a few laps, Chance woofed to get Keller into a playing mood. Keller didn’t react, and instead made his way over to Arturo from the porch.

“Chance is so good with him. Keller’s deaf. He’s the new addition, and Chance has taken right to him. The other day Keller got past the fence, who knows how, maybe I left it unlatched, and Chance—who never wanders anywhere, she always stays by the baby – just stuck with Keller. Wandering with him down the road, like she knows Keller’s part of the pack but there’s something not quite right with him, and so he needs a protector. Thank God.”

“So much new life,” Catarina said.

Catarina and Arturo walked back through the house, out to the backyard which opened to a bright view of the Santa Fe, a tiny city compared to New York from the Brooklyn Heights Promenade.

The yard led to an old two-story barn. The structure leaned to the left enough that a thick chain had been put in place on the right side to help prevent collapse. Inside was an open space with a dance floor. A wet smell of wood and horses still in the air. To one side were folded tables and chairs for the wedding, and to the other a giant canvas with a sheet draped over it—a painting to be unveiled after the ceremony and before the reception, Alice explained.

They ate at a round table in the center of the room. During dinner, which included greens and peppers from their garden, Arturo wiped his hands on his shirt: a habit Catarina had previously ironed out of him. A return to barbarism. Something in the disobedience aroused her. He always contained a vulgar brutish aspect that came out as he exercised and sweated. The stink of his unwashed clothing. He unclogged her shower drain before they knew each other well. A piece of his being that she cherished as a contained part of him. Now, the brute seemed in complete control of the whole, wiping his hands on his shirt, bearded, feral. *Well, let a man be a man*, she thought, *and let him want me as a woman*, yes. She allowed her smile to grow flirtatious as he joked.

After they finished eating, Alice stood and returned inside to wash dishes with a tired aloofness. No special games were planned, and in fact Alice was clearly in an annoyed mood, perhaps because in her break from being a mother she'd cooked and now was cleaning. Arturo suggested they go to the guest room while Leo helped Alice finish cleaning.

Alone, Arturo finally met Catarina's eyes. They kissed. The impact of sudden privacy together was more emotional than Catarina expected. He examined one side of her face then the other, and said, "You're here," as though disbelieving. She looked down to escape the intensity but

let herself be examined, self-conscious that perhaps her body would seem old or out-of-shape compared to the version he recalled.

“Well,” she said.

He gripped her to him, tugged at the back of her dress. Once on his bed, she touched his disorientingly foreign beard, his restored muscles. “Calm down,” she whispered “Take it slow.” But he couldn’t and the sex was over too soon, before they were even half undressed. The unspoken knowledge that this reunion was temporary gave their passion sadness and urgency.

As his breathing slowed, she whispered in his ear, “That’s for marrying someone else. That’s for moving on.” He ignored the awful, nonsensical unfairness of her comment.

He seemed to fall asleep for a time, but then began to speak as if he were in a confessional booth.

He described a vivid dream he’d had last winter: His name was still Leonard. He and Catarina fought, broke up, then made love, then fought about whether to get back together. They put the fighting aside to drink espresso near a fireplace. They bantered over whether the espresso was authentic. Catarina was being stubborn—had realized her wrongness about authenticity but was still arguing playfully, almost flirtatiously, pushing her toes underneath his jeans to warm them. They’d silently resolved to continue dating.

Arturo had awoken from the dream in a trailer in Santa Fe, Alice beside him on the small bed. He’d debated clinging to the dream, going back to sleep at once and hoping he would forget it all before morning, but he remembered.

He picked up Catarina’s hand and cracked her knuckles.

“I tried this once or twice on Alice but she hates it.”

Catarina turned away, spotted his glasses on an end table. “Your glasses have gotten all dirty again,” she said. “I need to tell Alice, to teach Alice to keep them clean or you’ll be blind soon.” She breathed into them, took a bit of sheet and cleaned them roughly, then put the glasses back on him.

He nodded sadly. “Best not. With two kids, she has no time to playact as old-fashioned.”

Something twisted inside her, an odd sensation that she’d lost her husband, even though Leo was in the next room—as if she’d abandoned the original and taken the imposter. Arturo acted less confident and bold. The change was plain in his soft tones and slightly slouched posture. What was broken and lost in Arturo, had for Leo grown too far in the other direction, now that he’d survived the split and burst into the wealthy ranks.

Arturo also had a new body language that was closed to her, arms folding across his chest as they spoke and a lack of eye contact. Something about being locked out bothered her, seemed unnatural, and created alluring mystery, a need to see inside him once more.

Looking away, Catarina asked again how things had been.

In the kitchen, Alice was washing up while Leo spoke and drank another glass of Arturo’s moonshine. She was feeling irritated that he hadn’t offered to help at least dry dishes in the rack, which Arturo did by instinct. She was also irritated how messy things had gotten around the place in recent weeks, bringing out bad memories of her biological mother and her stacks of junk—once matters died down she wanted to throw out half the house.

Leo was prattling. *Ugh, this again*, she thought. “This” wasn’t directed at Leo—it was the whole business of four of them together.

Alice’s means of handling the rejection was to reverse all her love for the other couple to hate. They were bordering emotions for her, and the fact that Art had never truly allowed himself to at least go through a cathartic period of being pissed off at them in response to how he’d been

treated was troubling. This, plus his insistent desire to invite them to the ceremony surfaced a worrisome old fear that he hadn't fully moved on from Catarina even after switching states and having children. Now here they were, invading their space the week of Alice's wedding!

She understood intellectually that Leo and Art had been the same man at one point, and she'd cared for Leo when the situation looked like they'd all four be a family. Sometime since the move a switch had flipped in her. She no longer felt a connection to Leo. Perhaps it was self-protection, or an imprinting instinct. Alice and Arturo were an island, and these other two were bad news at their shore. That was better treated with clear boundaries. Art had asked about what if Catarina and Leo made their way into the bedroom, and Alice had said she wasn't in that mood at all, but didn't care if he'd had a little fling with Catarina after everything. Alice hadn't meant it, had said it flatly, hadn't given permission with her heart, and though Art must have sensed her discomfort, he'd only nodded and hadn't raised the idea again.

Now with Leo going on about his new job (was that all he talked about these days?), she only felt resentment. Leo was Art *before* Alice put in the work to break down his unhealthy attachments to Cat. A version of Art that had stayed in New York. He looked unhealthy and unhappy. At the same time, Leo had a new cockiness, and firm posture where Art often slouched. Their clothes told a story, suggested wealth, enough to throw money at casualwear. Leo talked about his pro bono cases helping immigrants, going into detail, and Alice felt bad that she couldn't muster enthusiasm to engage even on this topic.

"Immigration is more Catarina's thing—I'm not really following you," Alice said, wanting him to shut up, but he just explained the same thing again more slowly. Arturo habits that annoyed her seemed amplified. The conversation was one-sided. So many dishes to wash! Why wasn't he picking up on her cold-shoulder?

The answer clicked. Leo's head wasn't on what he was saying, or what she was feeling at all. It was in the bedroom thinking about what was happening there too, and noticing that Alice felt bad for him. Did he expect her to invite him to her and Art's bedroom like a consolation prize? He hadn't made any overt move, and perhaps he just wanted to talk to keep his mind off *that room*. She became nervous that she'd need to refuse him, and that might ruin the next few days.

Alice finally found her voice. "Would you mind finishing up the dishes? I'm exhausted from the day, and really looking forward to sleeping through a night without two babies crying. I'll be fresher tomorrow, and a better conversationalist. You can sleep on the living room couch. I'm sorry it's not very nice, but with the kids it hard to keep up. Sheets are by the bathroom. Cover the cast iron so the mice don't poop in it. Art hates starting over with the seasoning."

Leo's face fell. Maybe she should say something more, but she didn't have the strength now. She left Leo alone with a sink full of dishes.

Things had been hard, Arturo admitted to Catarina. Part of him was waiting for Catarina even after their correspondence ended, and making space for this hope had kept him from fully giving himself to Alice. He did all the things a good partner would do, finding work, cooking meals, shopping, but a key piece of him was still in New York. The pregnancy was a surprise, and neither were certain what came next. She wanted reassurance that she wouldn't raise them alone; he vacillated between being needy and resentful, unfairly blaming her for the foursome not working out in New York. But then, Alice had left him for a long weekend, and a switch flipped. Arturo was ready to be with Alice for the rest of his life. They joked that the intoxication of young love had come just in time to make being new parents more bearable.

"I was a little surprised to hear you're doing law again. I thought maybe you'd use the second chance to open a bike shop or something artist."

“Like selling hand sculptures in the Santa Fe Plaza? Nah, that was more of a one-off, and after all the mischief it caused, that’s probably for the best. You need something that people will pay you to do. Personal injury pays the bills, and doesn’t ask whatever insane hours Leo’s doing. Maybe I’ll try something different down the line once the kids get a little older, but it works for now. And as much as I love Alice, she’s not ever going to make much salary. The dance studio doesn’t even pay Alice enough to cover our mortgage. But we’ve got a good setup. She likes teaching dance here more than her job in Brooklyn. She gets the kids excited. I’ve got the garden. There’s a woodworking class I’ve been meaning to take, but it’s hard to find the time.”

“We’ve been fine too,” Catarina said. “Busy.”

This felt callous, and she tried to soften herself.

“We’re both doing these prestigious jobs that have us rubbing shoulders with important people and doing important things that may lead us places, but it’s been consuming. I really never see friends. Maddie’s gone. Joyce does her thing in Philly. I’ve grown isolated. Sometimes I’m happy the nights I spend working late, particularly if Leo is working late. Somehow the work is good company,” she said. “I was afraid that you might hate me. I wouldn’t blame you.”

“I don’t hate you.” Arturo said. “How is Leo? Without the illusion that nothing could break your relationship, given that he could have been me.”

This stung but Arturo’s eyes showed no cruelty, only sadness. “We haven’t gone back to the way it was before the duplication,” she said. “But there isn’t the same headiness. I guess in some ways, we’ve been able to mourn together.”

“I’m glad you were able to do that,” Arturo said. “There’s a difficulty to not being able to lean on a partner when you lose your soul-mate. Alice was jealous and hurt, but mostly it comes out as anger. She felt rejected in a way I couldn’t, on my behalf almost. Because it’s hard for me to articulate anger.”

“It’s been hard for Leo too, in ways that he can’t express, and he pushes it into work,” she said, stroking his face. “And you’re still Leonard. I know you’re still Leonard.”

Arturo met her eyes. “Thanks,” he said. “Each step we took made sense, then you add it up. What if I hadn’t been the one who was shaved, maybe he’d have lost the job? I was foolish.”

“No, no, you weren’t. We were just ourselves. I was greedy for drawing things out so far,” she said. “Maybe when we retire and don’t have to worry what the world thinks we can all be together again.”

He tensed up. “Feels dangerous to dwell on. We can’t recreate that time; maybe sometime in the future we’ll create something new, its own thing. But even then, we can’t go back. It’s lost time.”

“Yes,” she said. “I’ve never been so present and focused on a relationship, where everything else feels cleared away. Just each other’s hearts and bodies.”

“A lot of pain too.” He exhaled heavily. “I don’t want to live in the past too much. It makes the present perfunctory.”

She wanted to ask him not to move on, but felt no right. She was already flirting with a Pandora’s Box being here and saying what she had.

In the silence hung the weight of time, the impossibility of reconciliation and even the cruelty of her presence at his wedding, reopening old wounds.

To break this weight, she talked work and his children. She said she thought of him and Alice often, so much that perhaps she’d really travelled into his vivid dream while her body slept in New York. Arturo touched her lips, her cheekbone, pressing against her forehead as if checking for a fever. When his fingers came close to her mouth, she sucked on one, but it drifted back out of her mouth, tracing back down to her lower lip, her chin and resting on her neck before his hand went slack and he snored lightly.

## Chapter Two

Alice's father, Hank, looked like a gray walrus with bad knees. He arrived the next morning with a hat full of wild mushrooms, which he placed on the kitchen counter, asking Alice to fry them. Only then did he greet Catarina, insisting she must be the lovely woman he'd heard so much about. Alice's mother, Molly, was older than Hank, but looked younger and more mobile. When she arrived, she announced to the room that she needed a younger man because this one wouldn't do much longer. Like this, the mushrooms were fried, and any awkwardness from the night before was crushed tightly and tucked into pockets.

While eating, they listened to some vinyl recordings on their old player in a new unfamiliar spot—considering each as a potential reading or as song for the wedding. The first was Alan Watts' talk describing love as divine madness. Watts recited in his mellow, hypnotic voice:

The moment that you enter into any kind of human undertaking in relationship, what an act of faith. See, you've given yourself up. But this is the most powerful thing that can be done: surrender. See. And love is an act of surrender to another person. Total abandonment. I give myself to you. Take me. Do anything you like with me. See. So, that's quite mad because you see, it's letting things get out of control. All sensible people keep things in control.

Catarina looked at the four of them and Alice's parents too, wondering how each of them heard and interpreted these words. Had Arturo selected the passage to critique Catarina's self-preservation instinct or describe their collective failure to remain vulnerable enough, to make more love work? But no, she was being self-absorbed: choosing the excerpt wasn't about Catarina, their old marriage or foursome; it was about Alice right now and going through marriage and risking heartbreak a second time. Or perhaps Alice had chosen it to encourage Arturo to open up to her, to join her in her vulnerability? Or was it simply how they did view love?

"Well, that's perfectly foolish," Catarina said, "but also a nice sentiment for a wedding, and it captures your philosophy—both your philosophies on love, I think. You should use it."

“Thanks,” Alice said, smiling quizzically.

\* \* \*

The next few days they barely saw the engaged couple. Instead, Leo and Catarina hiked, went to the Georgia O’Keefe Museum, cleaned the house, and looked after the twins.

Each had a distinct crawl—Philip was the military man on-the-hunt and, when he tired, the wounded soldier. Lisa had a sideways crab-leg crawl. Recently, Lisa had started to walk. They called her walking-style the drunken sailor, named after a song Alice often sang for Lisa while turning her upside-down. Alice seemed strained by everything, from breast-feeding to wedding planning to life itself. The twins often woke crying; their bed was on the second floor and you could hear them from the backyard.

While taking down laundry on the line, Catarina glanced at Leo and Arturo on the porch. They were doing their memory games together, seeing how they could predict each other and how they were diverging. Catarina was struck by a premonition that far in the future she’d receive a message from Alice saying that Arturo had dementia and that Leo might be next.

Catarina asked lightheartedly if the memory games showed anything new. “He’s using farmer words,” Leo said.

She found Alice in the laundry room. As they folded together, Alice touched Catarina’s arm.

“I have a favor,” Alice said. “Maybe a wedding gift.”

“Of course,” Catarina said.

“I’m really glad to see you,” Alice said. “And seeing the two of them again brings back a lot of good memories. We really had a special time in Brooklyn. Most people don’t have a chance to have something like we did.”

They folded in silence for a moment, then Alice continued, “But I have to ask: when you go back to New York, can you just forget about us for a long time? About me and Arturo?”

This caught Catarina off guard, a knife of rejection and hostility stuck in her side that stirred defensiveness. “Forget? What do you mean? We’re barely in touch already.”

“I know, I just . . . there’s no good way to say this. Just let Arturo move on, you know? To give us a chance, him and me. I tried doing things your way when you were running the show, but where did that get us? I think in some way you broke him a little. Or the breakup did. Can’t you see, I love him so much.” Her voice cracked with pain a little when she said this. “And I just want to give us the best chance we can have.”

Catarina tensed. “Does Arturo know what you’re asking?”

“Of course not, Catarina.” Something foreign flashed in Alice’s eyes, hatred that was buried quickly. “You know he’s still in love with you, and that’s hard and humiliating to say out loud, days before my wedding.” Alice refused to look at Catarina any longer, and folded faster. “But I’m saying it. So, back off.”

Catarina’s anger flared up, and she considered evidence in her defense, the children Catarina coveted that Alice already had with him. “I don’t—” she started, but Alice looked wounded and Catarina recalled that Alice too had been rejected when Catarina asked Arturo to leave, and that Alice had been the one willing to share. And, anyway, Alice was only translating her husband’s subliminal feelings for the world, in the way that wives often did.

“Okay,” Catarina said, not sure if she meant it, “let’s just enjoy the next few days, and then we’ll all say goodbye.”

“Thanks,” Alice said. “I’m glad you got to see our life here.”

\* \* \*

No more sleepovers happened between Catarina and Arturo. She realized that first night was a special stolen moment, and possibly not even pre-planned. She had gathered from subtle cues that Leo had not had sex with Alice the night Catarina was with Arturo.

They occupied their time helping out with the wedding, wandering through the small town, looking after the children and going on day hikes at the local Native American reservations. During their first long hike, on a plateau called Tent Rocks, the couple got winded quickly and had to turn back when they realized they brought too little water. Still, they enjoyed the cone-shaped boulders that towered 80 feet above them and they agreed their legs felt nice to be moving again. Although Arturo had sworn the gas shortages hadn't hit Santa Fe like New York—on their way back from the hike they ended up caught in a long line at a gas station. During the twenty-minute wait to refuel, Catarina confessed she'd been smoking again and swore to Leo she'd give smoking up for good so she wouldn't get out-of-breath so easily during their next hike. Leo just nodded without looking at her.

A few days in, Leo let Arturo know he needed to be on a conference call about a loan drawdown by the New York's Metropolitan Transit Authority.

They were drawing from the Revolving Credit Facility that was established in 1975 to keep the MTA from bankruptcy. Leo invited Arturo to listen in.

Before he dialed in, Leo said, "My officemate Sonny—I guess we're friends now, of a sort. He's been around for a while. I saw this photo of him from his twenties and he was so young and buoyant, now he's fat with bags under his eyes. Sometimes, all I can think of when I see him is me heading towards that like it's the pavement." Leo confessed he was eating more fats, sugars and salts because those were the only things he could taste vividly anymore.

He mentioned deals involving financial companies that Arturo hadn't heard of, disclosing them in a casual way that made clear Arturo should be impressed.

He'd brought his own phone with conferencing capability in case he'd needed it for work. Leo dialed, put the phone on speaker-mode and muted, then took out a pen and pad for notes. He also poured them two tumblers of Arturo's homemade moonshine, insisting they might need it.

The call went like this:

Several members of a London team joined the call. Someone anonymously joined the call, indicated by a beep followed by an automated voice saying “. . . has joined the call.” Someone was apologetic about the horrendous hour in London, particularly on a weekend, and hoped it didn’t interfere with any plans.

Someone started typing audibly and someone else had some static in the background like someone was washing dirty dishes. A distorted mechanical voice came on—like an answering machine message held close to the phone. Someone asked if they’d started, and Leo said they were waiting for everyone to join, and in the meantime maybe everyone could make sure they were on mute to avoid noise.

The static stopped but the typing sound continued. Someone asked if it was true Leo was handling the Barren Brothers estate. Leo said, “yup.” The man asked if folks had seen the news about reports of a wave of duplications in the USSR, then laughed and said the whole world was going mad. After a long moment Leo said, “That it is, but I hadn’t heard about that. Fax me the clipping.”

Someone joined who Leo, muting his speaker, identified to Arturo as “Abe aka the Important Man.” The Important Man suggested a page flip of the document. Two others spoke over each other, agreeing.

An in-house MTA lawyer had answers to each question the bankers asked about the financials but had no good answer to the larger question as to why the New York Subway system was leaking money. “It’s a hundred-year-old infrastructure,” he’d said defensively. “It’s going to have cracks. Also, some middle-class New Yorkers perceive our service as unsafe, causing ridership to weaken.”

Someone joined the call late and apologized for joining late, and then the Important Man said it was fine, as though he had the power to absolve tardiness.

A British banker asked if this was all covered by New York or British law.

“I know European banks involved,” Leo said with his eyes closed, “but it’s our subway system, so our laws. Section nineteen of the credit facility. Forum and law for disputes is Southern District.” Arturo felt awe in Leo’s confidence. Leo raised his eyebrows, proud, and sipped his moonshine.

Someone asked whether anyone had considered investing in Savings & Loans, which could serve as a cash-cow down thanks to American deregulation. Leo asked Arturo, “Is he joking? That has nothing to do with what we’re doing today.”

Someone else countered that instead, they should create special purpose entities that could get some of their bad assets off the balance sheet. Leo, now doodling on his pad and drinking Arturo’s moonshine, said to Arturo, “SPVs are ways to artificially inflate earnings—there was a recent scandal—so maybe that guy is pointing out how dumb the first suggestion was? Or maybe they’re both bad businessmen, and that’s why they’re in bankruptcy?”

“Aren’t you afraid you’ll say something and forget to mute?” Arturo asked.

Leo shrugged. “That little light is on so we’re safe,” Leo said. “But I’m sure that mistake has happened.”

The Important Man said that investing in S&Ls and using SPVs were interesting ideas, but maybe the MTA’s mandate should be tabled for another call. This call, he said, would be more productive if they focused on this document, the sole gating item to today’s disbursement; suppliers needed to be paid. “Thank God,” Leo said. “He’s pissed they’re wasting time. Time they are paying for.”

Someone else said maybe they should hold off on circulating a revised draft, and instead they should make edits based on the call to this point first. The Important Man noted the document needed to be ‘form agreed’ today for the next draw-down of the revolving loan that needed to be disbursed today to prevent bankruptcy. They soldiered through.

When the call ended, Leo held up his notepad, which consisted of doodles of a creepy garden orchard, the date and the time of the next check in call, and a memo to double-check dollar amounts on page fifteen.

“That’s that,” Leo said. “In New York right now, the team is likely going to Peter Luger’s Steak House to celebrate, but I’ll be happy with a shot of your moonshine.” He did shoot it, and shuddered a bit as it went down. “Thanks to that phone call, a loan disbursement worth \$60 million was drawn from a \$800-dollar revolving credit facility that will allow the New York subway to avoid bankruptcy for another month.”

“What would have happened if that loan hadn’t gone through today?” Arturo asked. “Does the subway just shut down?”

“Doubtful, but a lot of pain. Local suppliers aren’t paid, worse service than now, layoffs, and I’d guess ultimately some bailout from employee pensions funds.”

Leo refilled his tumbler, while Arturo’s glass hadn’t been touched at all.

“That’s insane, that workers paychecks everywhere are going through or not going through because of conversations like that,” Arturo said. “Do you like your job?”

“Mostly. Everyone I work with would be the smartest person in most rooms, smarter than our clients. You remember how working for Augie, our half-efforts got praise—here people only note your mistakes, and the only positive feedback you really get is more work. It’s an adjustment.”

“How much are you drinking these days?”

“Not during work, unless I’m working on vacation. I joke that the long hours get in the way of my recreational alcoholism.”

“That’s not funny, and you’re not an alcoholic, Leo. You’re stressed.” Something smug crept into Arturo’s tone that irritated Leo. “Your job seems fucking awful.”

“I should move to New Mexico instead, and playact as bohemian while paying the bills as an ambulance-chaser?” Leo asked. “Maybe find a younger woman?”

Arturo punched Leo in the eye. Leo fell over, and came up with a bloody nose. He didn’t say anything, just stared at Arturo until he went for a rag and some ice, then let Leo hold it to the eye.

“I’ll forgive this because you owed me,” Leo said. “I only meant all jobs are awful in the worst lights. But it’s not all awful. I won asylum for eleven Argentines. The salary is absurd. Only thing I had to do was sell my soul to the Man.” He tipped his moonshine towards Arturo.

“Let me see it,” Arturo said, moving the rag away. “No marks. Lucky I held back at the end.”

“Gee, thanks, buddy,” Leo said. He put the rag down. What he thought was maybe blood was just water from the ice, which caused relief and an odd disappointment. His face still throbbed a bit, but now that they’d agreed the blow had been no big deal, he didn’t want to go on holding ice to it. “I’d like to give you some money. A lump sum.”

“You don’t owe us anything,” Arturo said. They’d split their savings fifty-fifty, which was generous given that Catarina had saved money too.

“The money isn’t about anything being owed. Starting over is expensive. We wouldn’t tell anyone, even Cat or Alice, unless if you prefer.”

“If you’re going to be doing secret favors, there’s something I should tell you.” Arturo opened his mouth and wasn’t sure if he could share. He hoped his duplicate would predict his thoughts and acknowledge it for him. “I wrote Cat back when you started the job.”

Leo's eyes grew suspicious. "She wrote back?"

"For a while, then she asked me to stop and I did."

Leo massaged the punched eye. "Okay," he said, his deep tone suggesting he hadn't decided if everything was okay.

"I won't take money," Arturo said. "But when Alice's old Pontiac died last year, we needed to get a new car fast to keep going. Interest rate is pretty rough. Maybe tomorrow we can ride into town and pay that off."

"And the debt Alice mentioned on that hike, is that under control? That something she looks at, or does she let you handle it?"

"I handle it. She still owes six grand that she doesn't even know about. She's handling enough with the kids."

Leo whistled. "I can't pay that much now, but give me the paperwork and I'll knock it out over the next year or so. You two won't need to think about it."

"That's generous."

"Happy to help."

They didn't discuss any strings tied to this agreement, but Arturo understood. In addition to lost pride, the invisible price was whatever link remained with Catarina.

### Chapter Three

The wedding took place inside the barn.

Dean had driven pumpkins driven down from NY and early guests carved them. The lawn was filled with pickup trucks of friends and an array of lit jack o' lanterns. Pumpkin soup greeted stragglers. Several dogs, as excited as anyone else, ran around throughout.

By the barn entrance, a corkboard welcomed everyone. Someone had pinned Alice's childhood report card and circled the summary evaluation, "displays advanced dancing skills, sometimes to excess, such as in her chair, during Math Class."

While guests trickled in Alice's father Hank sat in a corner with a band and they played a lively set with shocking virtuosity (such a talented family of artists!). They hopped effortlessly from Springsteen's "Spirit in the Night" (Arturo's favorite), to Elvis's "Little Less Conversation" (Alice's favorite), to Bo Diddley, to lively funk songs Catarina didn't recognize. Between songs Hank chatted with his bandmates, frequently piercing the room with his laughter; he was joyously, infectiously drunk.

When the room instinctually hushed in reaction to the music ending, Hank reluctantly removed his strap and put down his guitar reverently. This painful step completed, he smiled again and walked up to the podium, gin-and-tonic still in hand, with the air of someone used to commanding a room's attention. He started off the ceremony with no introduction or preface, quoting Whitman:

*Afoot and light-hearted, I take to the open road,*

*Healthy, free, the world before me.*

*The long brown path before me, leading wherever I choose.*

Hank said he was delighted Alice had found someone else who loved the open road as well as she did. Now they could travel the road together.

Dean officiated. He joked that when Leo first met Catarina and won her over, he'd assumed it was a fluke. But now that Arturo had also won over Alice, with that same face, surely some dark magic must be at work. The crowd generally took this in stride, laughing even if it was not so funny, though Catarina sensed Dean was evoking her Catholic superstitions about the whole thing.

Right after Arturo put the ring on, before the kiss, he said “wait” and accepted a pen from Dean and drew a smile beneath the triangle of freckles on her arm. “Oh brother,” Alice said loudly in mock exasperation, but she smiled like a woman in love. Then, he pulled her in close at the waist and kissed her.

The entirety of the ceremony took fifteen minutes. Then the audience threw birdseed instead of rice so that the birds could get a high from the day too. “It’s like seeing a younger brother’s ceremony,” Leo whispered.

To mark the shift from wedding to reception, a giant canvas cloth was swept down in a single dramatic moment. Leo’s first thought when he saw the canvas was relief. Something within their core remained identical. The painting was of a distinct moment from their childhood; one that he’d never thought to paint but should have.

Leo whispered the explanation to Catarina: When Leo (then Leonard) had been six years old, on the day of a class experiment each kid received a balloon with an envelope stapled to the string. Each kid said a little about themselves in a note that went into the envelope. The experiment was just seeing how far helium balloons travelled via people who found them, but Leonard felt pressure to do the assignment well. He decided the trick was to be witty and brief. No one wanted to read much. And the drawing outside should colorfully communicate: “Open me—I’m from a kid.” His had a crayon drawing of a stranger with his dog finding a balloon with a Sherlock Holmes magnifying glasses. They only put the address of the school, so that no one who found the balloon

would try to hand deliver it back to the student's home. The teacher would pin each self-addressed stamped envelope to a corkboard with a gold star on the ones that went the furthest.

Leonard's whole school filled the schoolyard and, on cue, up all the balloons went and the sky was momentarily blotted out with red. Leonard's heart leaped, as he tried to follow his personal balloon for as long as possible, but all the balloons were identical and he instead took in the rush of the moment.

The stupid kids let theirs go too close to the metal school fence and the balloons got stuck shamefully under the curved loop at the fence's top—at first making every effort to struggle to keep going upwards, to be free—pushing firmly back upwards each time the wind knocked them down — then growing weaker until they finally became wilted plastic prunes, some even somehow getting tangled in the fencing and ignored with their hopeful letters still dangling.

The day was windy, which the teacher said was good news. She then went to a girl who had clung to her balloon like she had never had a balloon before (maybe she hadn't). When the teacher finally convinced the girl to let go, she had waited too long and there was no chance that it could ever join the red herd, the bulk of which was already starting to disperse.

Young Leonard felt a delight in doing something risky you weren't supposed to do (letting a balloon go), the hope that yours with your little drawing and note would go the furthest, and the raw performance art and beauty of the balloons all up there in the sky.

He got a response from a man named Paul. Paul was 34, going to be in a major piano recital later that week (the most important of his life), and felt butterflies. He wrote that Leonard should always keep his bright sense of humor and he could be anything he wanted to in this life. Several classmates got letters back from further away, but no one got a more detailed response. Here was a man in the prime of his life taking out time on an important week to pick up Leonard's balloon and write to him. Now Paul must be in his fifties, perhaps an accomplished pianist touring the world.

The letter was thrown out at the end of the year with the rest of the class's responses and, anyway, he'd provided no last name or return address. Yet, in some sense, the piano recital still felt like it hadn't happened yet, because he'd never learned how it had gone.

Arturo's canvas was huge enough to get lost in: the viewer was on the ground looking up. You could see Leonard's little hand reaching upwards having released something. The sky was full of red globes with golden tails with little kids' drawings pinned to them, just barely there enough to understand what they were. His old classmate Sharon was nearby, but off the canvas, blurry like she was in Leo's memory, as her balloon trailed behind the rest. The oil had been manipulated to exactly capture the innocent exuberance of watching the herd of balloons escape.

Caterina, enchanted by this lengthy story, walked to the wall to examine closer. On a musician's stand was a typewritten explanation, highly similar to the one Leo had provided. A long list of names was credited for the painting, so Arturo hadn't become an art prodigy; more of a director of arts. What cut her, though, was the painting's title at the bottom of the page.

It was called:

*Image of the Goings On in Arturo's Heart as He Meets Alice Dancing at the Prospect Park Bandshell and Wins Alice Over Unwittingly with His Immaculate Smile.*

This made Catarina want to leave Santa Fe. The title referenced a time (the night he met Alice) when Leonard was intact and solely her husband, a time when he shouldn't be having dramatic feelings for other women. Arturo's old feeling could be innocently explained: people rewrite memories given the flow of life; Arturo's image was of wonder, and not sexual; perhaps he'd taken some creative license for the occasion. Still, Catarina's gut reaction was disgust, an indignant feeling that *Alice had no right*.

Leo and Catarina sat for their meal.

"We don't turn out lights when we leave rooms anymore," Catarina said.

“Huh. I didn’t realize. But you’re right. That was fast.”

“Art caught me yesterday. He stared at me like I’d done something and couldn’t figure out what I’d done. Then he shut off the light. That was it, but he looked at me like I’d become someone else. Someone who didn’t worry about electric bills.”

Leo removed his glasses and looked lost in the thought. “And I’ve grown fat,” he said finally, joking but not joking.

She stared at him blankly—carefully focusing on his eyes only, not his waist. “If you don’t leave me for not knowing how to Charleston, I’ll stay with you.”

He laughed, but also looked a little hurt. It was the wrong answer because she’d confirmed he was out-of-shape. What he wanted to hear was that he and Arturo looked identical or, better, that she preferred Leo’s body, but with Arturo ten feet away, the lie would feel too blatant. Typically, she could blame natural aging and flatter him. Life had done what it had done. These were the trades. “I love your body,” she added. This was true enough. He just shook his head, and she saw him going through his version of her teenage weight struggles, and felt pity for him.

Alice and Arturo visited and said how happy they were that everyone came. Alice spoke, and Arturo had the same dumb smile Leonard had had at his wedding to Catarina. Alice shook each of their hands until her sister pulled at her shoulder and told Alice it was time for her speech.

Everyone’s eyes followed Alice to the stage. Leo said she looked happy, and Catarina agreed.

Alice stood in front of the crowd and said, “To paraphrase Hemingway, I fell in love with Arturo two ways: gradually, then suddenly. Gradually during our long friendship, then all at once when he took a risk and moved to my hometown. For that miracle, I’ll always be . . .” She squeaked and could not finish. She exhaled. She laughed. “Okay, you get it,” she said, “I’m going to dance now.”

And she did dance, and the entire barn erupted in dancing, many of the tables refolded to make more space, and even then a bunch of vehicles out on the lawn tuned to the same salsa station outside so overflow folks could dance a different style out there. So many people Catarina and Leo didn't know had come to celebrate and show support.

Leo, with the look of the inspired, started jotting on the napkin Catarina had used. *First you fall in love. Then you slowly find out who it is you fell in love with. I fell in love with you long ago, moments after meeting you. Now, I learn I am the luckiest man who ever lived.* She squeezed his leg in response.

Halfway through the dance the couple broke apart. Alice danced holding little Phillip and Arturo holding little Lisa. After the dance, Lisa began crying and Alice announced little Philip and Lisa were to be put to bed, as it was well past their normal bedtime. Alice's sister whisked them off.

Then the newlyweds found each other again still holding onto the children, the band picked up and everyone joined the floor. Catarina decided the exact distance to appropriately admire an ex-lover is eight feet away while dancing with your own current lover. How happy Arturo looked! Even with stresses of fatherhood and money. She badly wanted to see Leo as happy. She reflected that perhaps she had won some battles that she should have lost with Leo, and maybe she didn't always know what she wanted from him. She searched for a tangible gesture that she could make, short of moving to Santa Fe. A switch flipped in her mind, and she realized there was something they both wanted that she was ready for now, too.

"I want you to get me pregnant," Catarina whispered into his ear as they danced, "and I want to learn to dance like that." Leo studied Catarina, looking for the joke. His face opened with relief and he smiled for the rest of the dance, not radiating as much as the bride and groom, but new warmth broke through from him.

The band played festive bluegrass, mixed with some Frank Sinatra and recent dance music. The newlyweds' enthusiasm willed the clashing styles into harmony and overcame the band's

weaknesses when they veered from bluegrass. Then after the band finished and the night grew late someone put on the Rollings Stones' *Some Girls*. Alice changed out of the wedding dress into something that let her move as she was meant to move. A whiskey bottle made its way onto the floor during "Miss You" and everyone took a shot—Arturo dabbing himself to the beat beneath each jawbone as if it was cologne, then absolving the rest of the dancers with a whisky cross in the air.

Arturo then returned to Alice, and danced with one hand still holding the bottle, one arm wrapped around Alice's back. The newlyweds couldn't seem to decide whether they wanted to dance fast or slowly. They settled on slowly and Alice kissed him, seemingly overcome with a momentary agony that could only be cured by a private intimacy that blocked out the outside world watching. Catarina realized her own presence soiled something pure about this, made Alice's act seem defensive.

"She's happy," Catarina said, squeezing Leo's hand. "Let's go, please?"

"They both are," Leo said. "Yes, let's go."

They moved off the dance floor and left the barn without saying goodbye to the bride and groom.

Outside, the desert air had a new chill. Salsa was no longer playing on the old crackling car radios, and a group of wedding-goers were on the lawn, listening intently to the radio rather than dancing. Without saying anything, they walked slowly away from the barn down a sandy wilderness path toward the Santa Fe skyline. She took out a cigarette.

"Please don't smoke," he said.

She threw it away. "Leo," she said. "If we're going to have a kid, maybe it's a good time for you to quit Amber & Morgan. Find something that will give us more time."

"I just got there," he said.

“I know, and I’m proud you got the job. I know how improbable and difficult that was. I *wanted* you to take it. But now . . . it’s not good for us. I’m not saying you quit the law entirely, just something with less hours. There’s positions in between what you had before and now.”

“Kids are expensive. Plus, now the apartment. And you, are you going to cut back your hours to raise children?”

“I would if I was the one working too hard.” She looked away. “You’re working too hard.”

“I have to work too hard to keep up. Every step of the way. You don’t know what it’s like. I have to compete twice.”

“You think that I haven’t had to compete twice as hard?”

“Come off it, you’ve had it easy ever since law school! You had someone pay for your classes, a maid to handle laundry. My commute was an hour just to get to classes. Air conditioning while you studied overlooking Central Park. Then with me, you’ve got a homemade meal waiting when you come home each day. All those little things add up.”

“You’re right, you’re so brilliant and noble. You earned your law degree with no help from anyone,” she said cuttingly, mockingly. She knew Augie had put in a call to admissions. “Whereas I only did well because of Duncan, and now I’m only doing well because of you. If only Maddie had been clever enough to marry well, perhaps she’d still be a district attorney.”

He smoldered, a pissed off look creeping into his eyes, which delighted her a little since she hit the nerve she’d aimed for. Despite that angered look, his voice grew more restrained rather than angered. “I know sexism killed Maddie’s job. And I wasn’t saying you weren’t smart or that your degree was tainted; you still had to beat all the people groomed to succeed from childhood. I’m saying, we did it, we made it. We broke into this world of the rich and I’m constantly reminded how easily that can be taken away. Just like you were afraid of the duplication getting out. It’s a really big decision to walk away from that.”

“I don’t talk about Duncan much, because he’s ancient history and I know you don’t like to hear it. And it’s easy to re-write the past when something doesn’t work out in the end, but Duncan and I did have a deeply wonderful marriage before we didn’t. Things turned out for the best, but honestly, until I signed the divorce papers, sometimes I regretted ever going to law school. Being there, I got too caught up in the competitiveness. I demanded perfection of myself to get great grades, and focused only on the competition. I let Duncan handle the logistics of living. I felt secure in him, and thought our happy marriage would still be where I left it after I graduated. I ignored it, and our connection withered with nobody tending it.”

In the silence, she let him fill in what this meant for their current marriage.

“Are you surprised to hear that I had a happy marriage?” she asked. She licked her lips and now watched his eyes carefully, feeling vulnerable, afraid to be judged.

“You’ve hinted at it before, maybe even said similar things I didn’t want to let sink in. But sometimes it’s easy to mistakenly assume that people, and their relationships, always have been roughly like they are when you meet them. And it’s hard to accept a key reason we got together was you neglecting your prior marriage.”

“And I don’t want to take away his blame for how things played out: his temper, his cheating, and his letting that resentment build. He could have communicated better; we both could have,” she said. “Leo, now is our test. Our chance to learn from all the messy pain. Duncan. Alice. Art. All of it.”

Leo nodded. “I’m sorry we couldn’t make things work with Art and Alice,” Leo said. “It would have been nice to stay part of their world. Look at this amazing community they were able to build out here from scratch.”

“I’m sorry too.”

His hand slipped into hers, and he squeezed. “Makes me think of that Rodin sculpture I made for Alice’s show. I’m grateful I still have permission to touch your hand.”

“I forgot that was both of you. You’re such a fucking sentimental asshole sometimes.” She shook her head as tears streamed down her cheeks. She wiped tears away, sniffed, snorted and laughed. “I can’t believe you fucking had a whole group make an artwork of a moment during our marriage.”

He moved his face close to her, sensing a victorious end to the conversation. “I thought we said no blaming Art’s choices on me. He’s hurting; you left him.”

“I’m not blaming him; I’m blaming you for having that memory somewhere in you. You jerk.” She pushed him. “I can’t believe I married you. Left another man for you.”

“I can’t believe I’m going to quit my job for you,” he said, pulling her back close again. She let herself be pulled.

They kissed, and she felt like his wife again. They looked ahead. The Santa Fe skyline behaved oddly, twinkling like Christmas lights. Then, the skyline went dark.

They turned around back towards the barn, which was only about a hundred feet away, and a few moments later, the lights went out in the barn too, then flickered back on more dimly. The solar panel worked!

They returned at a rapid walk pace. The salsa paused and the news came on in Spanish shouting the obvious: blackout! A failed Albuquerque power plant! Catarina found the announcer’s thick Cuban accent hard to follow. A minute later, a contradictory report said the outage started in Arizona. The whole southwest grid was down. Five minutes later, a breaking report based on a caller from the plant outside Albuquerque said his coworker in the energy control room had gone mad and abruptly left his workstation unmanned, though it was unclear if his leaving caused the blackout or the blackout caused his panic. No riots or disruptions were mentioned. Then Catarina

remembered Santa Fe didn't have enough population or desperation to properly riot. She forced her muscles to relax and noticed that Leo was looking up at the second floor of Arturo's home; the twins were crying up there but something sounded off.

"Come," Leo said, "quickly." He headed for the house, hesitated, then ran towards the barn.

When they returned inside the revelry, the air was electric. Catarina could almost see waves of the news of the blackout come across the crowd. Catarina grabbed a fistful of Leo's suit-jacket, so as not to lose him in the sea of bodies.

"Forty percent," someone said.

Leo gripped the arm of Alice's father, Hank, his face sweaty and beet red.

"Where's the bride and groom?" Leo asked.

"They left already."

"To where?" Leo asked, serious.

Hank looked bewildered, and Leo let him go.

"No, not nearly that much, naked people would be all around us," someone said.

"The ones we're seeing are only the ones who happened to be outside."

"It's just streakers," someone else said. "Being playful."

A blow from a nude woman knocked the wind out of Catarina. The woman was large, middle-aged and terrified. She'd split halfway and the lower half of her was still coming apart such that she branched out at the waist and had four legs. She let out a scream.

A bell rang in the back of Catarina's mind and her thoughts went blank. After the blankness one thought emerged: *How will we feed them all?* After this thought, a flood of others followed, many arriving as fragments: *everything old is outdated, social mores, business models, infrastructure, new laws to resolve disputes, maybe a second Alice and a third Leonard would show up at my doorstep. Ghost towns would fill up and need clean water. I'm having a panic attack. Peggy Lee singing 'Is that all there is? If that's all there is then let's keep*

*dancing.’ Games in Alice’s Brooklyn house. Anything could be. A second chance. The bird that Leonard pointed out to calm me on the abandoned highway, just before he duplicated.*

Leo grabbed the woman at the waist and, using force, pushed her to the ground and covered her with his suit-jacket. Leo gestured, and Catarina gave him a wrap from her purse.

“Shh shh,” Leo said, crouching next to the stranger. After her scream, the woman started speaking to herself in a guttural language in a manner that sounded like prayer. Leo placed his hand on the closer stranger’s forehead firmly as the splitting process slowly completed. Another man near them tore off his clothes, instantly split, then threw back their heads and howled in perfect unison.

Catarina leaned on Leo’s shoulder, overwhelmed. Leo looked up at Catarina and with his free arm wrapped his hand around Catarina’s bare ankle and squeezed it, as if to comfort her.

In that connection, she recalled the odd crying from the second floor. *They’ll be very hungry*, she thought and grabbed a plate of wedding cake from a random table and headed for the house, through the living room, Leo now following Catarina.

She dashed up the stairs, knocked lightly on the twins’ door, and whispered their names. The crying had stopped but now started again. Opening the door, they were there, little Phillip staring watchfully through the bars of his crib. At the end of his gaze were two Lisas huddled in partial darkness, clinging to each other at the far corner of their crib.

They resembled nothing more than beaten dogs, or lab animals in cages that knew the scientist’s gloved hand was about to inject them with some unknown substance or test a women’s leg razor on their hides. Leo said something in a calm voice that Catarina didn’t hear, but later learned was “Just because there’s two of you now doesn’t mean you get a later bedtime.” Catarina didn’t hear because, holding a paper plate of wedding cake dumbly like a poor tribute to new life, the only thing she could feel was a frightening amount of love for her former husband’s new daughters, and relief as they—of all things—giggled.