

JANUARY THAW

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CJWells_2000@yahoo.com

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CHAPTER TWO

FRESCOES OF THE NYMPHS

Lindsay stood inside of her massive walk-in closet. Situated ever so neatly there hung an organized assortment of blouses, skirts, dress suits, dress slacks, casual dresses, evening dresses and elegant evening gowns. Below the clothing were shoe racks lined with footwear of almost every type. Staring at her clothing, Lindsay heaved a heavy sigh. *My closet is the size of a warehouse and I have absolutely nothing to wear*, she thought. She had the perfect apparel for her work, business meetings, business travel, fine dining and important social functions, but for brunch at a popular cappuccino hangout, with a beautiful girl, she believed that she was sorely lacking.

Frustrated, she stormed out of the closet and grabbed her car keys off her dresser before realizing that she was still only in her underwear. Laughing at herself, she plopped down on the edge of her bed and stared at her keys.

Lindsay Alasdair's life had been perfectly mapped out for her. Born into extreme wealth, it was her destiny to step into her father's shoes as the head of the Alasdair family fortune. As an only child, Lindsay was spared the quagmire of sibling rivalry, but she was also therein denied the joy of having a sibling. She did have friends here and there; daughters of her parents' college friends or business associates. However, those relationships were often contingent on the continued association of Lindsay's parents with the others. Richard Alasdair, Lindsay's father, was never one to maintain close personal ties with anyone over any extended period of time, thus Lindsay never experienced slumber parties, summer camp or Saturday morning soccer matches. Sadly, as she grew into her teens, any need for friendship was replaced by a determined focus on her studies and that destiny.

Lindsay was sent away to a top boarding school on the East Coast. As an adolescent, her extracurricular activities were stereotypically blue-blooded: equestrian sports, semesters overseas, ski trips to Vail, debutante balls, summer vacations at Martha's Vineyard and arranged dates with future Ivy Leaguers. As for her predetermined entry into the Ivy

League, she chose the smaller Dartmouth for her undergraduate education.

However, it was during Lindsay's first year at Harvard Business School that she met Martin MacMahon. He was completing his second year at Harvard Law. Lindsay was attracted to his keen intellect and sharp wit. They hit it off so well that they became engaged after only a six-month courtship. Although Lindsay's mother, Evelyn Summerfield-Alasdair, was initially concerned that the two young adults were rushing into marriage, Richard was immediately excited about the union. Martin hailed from a prominent New England family and was a sixth generation Harvard Law graduate. Richard saw the union as the picture perfect family and business collaboration.

Despite Lindsay's vacuumed existence, she did manage to keep one well-maintained secret during her formative years. When she was a young girl, she began pen paling with her cousin, Keith Newburgh. Keith was the son of one of Lindsay's maternal aunts. Evelyn Summerfield's family was prosperous, but unlike the silver spoon Alasdairs, who could trace their banking and real estate fortune back to before the American Revolution, the Summerfields were "new money" upstarts. In Richard Alasdair's mind, his father-in-law was not a successful businessman, but rather a high-school dropout who started a commercial lumber equipment company and married a Catholic. To him, his wife's siblings were equally troublesome. Evelyn's brother Danny drank and bet on the horses. Her brother Frank protested the Vietnam War and did time for civil disobedience. Her sister Francis was twice divorced and "refused to marry" her current longtime live-in boyfriend. Evelyn's other sister, Shelley Newburgh, also divorced, once danced topless at a Las Vegas nightclub. And they all voted for Bill Clinton... twice.

Because Richard considered the Summerfields to be bad influences on his precocious daughter, he manipulated an increasingly restrictive interaction between Lindsay and her mother's family. It was when she was eight that Lindsay first noticed that her aunts, uncles and cousins were not appearing at the Alasdair estate for the annual holiday gatherings. When her favorite cousin Keith and his mom were absent from the annual fundraiser that following January, Lindsay sneaked her mother's phonebook and, stealing one of her father's stamps and an envelope, wrote Keith a letter on her notebook paper. Keith, who was a year older, wrote back and explained the reason behind his absence at the Alasdairs. Although this greatly angered the child Lindsay, she dared not confront her menacing father. Thus began her clandestine correspondence and friendship with her cousin Keith.

Cell phones and emailing had long ago replaced years of stealing stamps and envelopes, and Lindsay found herself seriously needing the advice of her dear cousin. Throwing her keys back up on the dresser, she grabbed her cordless and dialed Keith's cell phone number.

"Hey sexy-mamma," said the voice on Lindsay's receiver.

"Keith, I'm having a crisis," Lindsay exclaimed to her cousin.

“Calm down, girlfriend,” he replied. “What’s the matter?”

“I’m having brunch in less than an hour and I don’t have a thing to wear!”

Lindsay had to take the phone receiver away from her ear to avoid the noise of the laughter that followed.

“Okay, here’s what you do,” Keith said in his thick New York City accent after calming down to chuckling. “Walk into your closet, close your eyes and point. When you open your eyes, put on whatever you’re pointing at.”

“I’m serious, you asshole!” Lindsay cried out. “I can’t wear what’s in my closet to THIS.”

“Well, help me here, Lin,” Keith replied. “What exactly is THIS?”

“I’m giving a newspaper interview,” she declared.

“Yeah, and?”

“I’m meeting her at eleven.”

“Okay, so?”

“It’s at a coffeehouse.”

“Hello? I’m still not seeing the problem, Lin.”

At that moment, Lindsay’s heart started pounding in her chest. “I don’t want to look stuffy,” she said. “I want her... to know that I’m not stuffy.”

“Why do you give a shit what some newspaper hack thinks, Lin?” Keith asked. “Hell, if she works for that local rag, she probably already thinks that you’ve got a rod up your ass.”

“I don’t think she does,” Lin said. “And if she does, I want to change her mind.”

“Why?”

Lindsay couldn’t answer.

“Why?” Keith repeated.

“I just fucking do, okay?”

“Calm down, cuz,” Keith stated. “Tell me what you expect from this interview and perhaps I can help you.”

“I want it to be casual,” Lindsay said after a few deep breaths to slow her heart rate. “I want to talk to her, not just answer questions. I want her to be comfortable with me.”

Keith was at a loss as to why it was so crucial for this very important woman to impress a newspaper reporter, until something that he had long time suspected struck him.

“Lin,” he started, “do you know this gal?”

“Not really,” came Lindsay’s reply.

“Do you like her?”

“How can I like her if I don’t really know her?”

“Okay,” he said after a deep sigh. “Do you want to KNOW her?”

“What do you mean by that?”

“You tell me, dear,” Keith flamboyantly quipped.

“Are you going to help me here or not!?!” Lindsay exclaimed, obviously avoiding Keith’s line of questioning.

“I’ll help you, cuz,” Keith said. “I just have one more question.”

“What?” came Lindsay’s curt query.

“Does this reporter have short fingernails or play softball, by chance?”

“EXCUSE ME!?!”

Lindsay and Keith went back and forth for several more minutes before he was able to persuade her to wear one of her more casual blue cotton blouses with the one pair of beige low cut, flare-legged stretch khaki pants that she possessed. Topping the ensemble off with a wide studded belt and a pair of high-top hiking boots that she had purchased over two years ago but had not worn, Lindsay stood in front of her mirror and eyed her attire. A mysterious smile invaded her face. *This is perfect*, she thought before picking up and speaking to the patiently awaiting Keith.

“How are things looking on your end, cuz?” he asked.

“Just fine, Keith,” she replied. “Thank you.”

“Not a problem. Just be sure to tell me how this *interview* goes,” he remarked before chuckling and hanging up.

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Rejeanne arrived at the Karmic Java Coffeehouse fifteen minutes early. She wanted to be on time and anticipated midmorning-parking problems, especially since piles of plowed snow on the street would have invariably sacrificed a spot or two.

Once seated, Rejeanne debated whether or not she should order her first double mocha latte before Lindsay’s arrival. When the waitress approached to take her order, she decided to wait. Fortunately, the wait wasn’t long.

It was only moments later when Lindsay walked into Karmic Java. Rejeanne spotted her immediately and flagged her over to the booth where she sat. As Lindsay approached, Rejeanne’s jaw nearly dropped. Lindsay was removing her long, sleek black leather coat as she walked, which revealed a beautifully contoured, casually dressed body. Hanging the coat on an adjacent hook, Lindsay gracefully slid into the booth. It was at that point that Rejeanne noticed that she was hopelessly staring.

“Hi,” Rejeanne said shyly.

“Hi,” Lindsay replied as she too realized that she was staring at the blonde beauty sitting before her. “Sorry I’m late.”

“You’re not,” Rejeanne remarked. “Actually, you’re a whole two minutes early.”

“Groovy.”

Rejeanne chuckled. “Are your parents ex-hippies too?”

“Uh, no. Why?”

Before Rejeanne could respond, the waitress reappeared.

“You first, Lindsay,” Rejeanne said.

“Raspberry herbal tea,” was Lindsay’s order.

She’s in a caffeine addict’s paradise and she orders that? Rejeanne thought. “Double mocha latte for me, please.”

“Will either of you be ordering lunch?” the waitress asked.

Lindsay and Rejeanne looked at each other. “Perhaps in a little while,” came Rejeanne’s response as she looked into Lindsay’s dazzling blue eyes for her approval.

“Yes, in a little while,” Lindsay confirmed as she smiled at Rejeanne.

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Rejeanne’s interview began as most of her interviews begin, with a superficial history of her subject’s life. Lindsay told her all of the basics; her birth in New York City, her schooling, her parents’ backgrounds, their schooling, their work, her work and her husband’s work. She provided a general outline of the Alasdairs’ financial holdings in domestic and international banking and real estate, their corporate stockholdings and the rich history and valuable work of the charitable foundation. As Lindsay spoke, Rejeanne typed away on her laptop, which was positioned at an angle on the table so that it didn’t obstruct her view of Lindsay. As she typed, she also looked away from it occasionally to nod, smile or somehow affirm her interest in what Lindsay was saying. It was Rejeanne’s intent to capture the woman behind the words.

After about her third double mocha latte, however, Rejeanne was ready to alter the subject somewhat. Saving her document and closing her laptop, she rubbed her hands together, took a gulp of her latte and turned her full attention to the beauty sitting across from her.

“Okay, Lindsay,” she stated. “Let’s talk about some real stuff.”

“Pardon me?”

“Well, I know everything I need to know about ‘Lindsay Alasdair-MacMahon,’” Rejeanne said as she cupped her fingers, quotation-style. “Now I want to know about home-girl Lindsay.”

Lindsay couldn’t comprehend why, but all of a sudden, she was feeling nervous. “What have I not told you?”

“Well, for starters, what was your favorite TV program as a kid?”

Lindsay looked down at her mug. “I don’t think I had one.”

“Okay, well, how old are you?” Rejeanne asked.

“Almost thirty-three,” was Lindsay’s reply.

Nice age, Rejeanne thought. “So you mean to tell me that ‘The Facts of Life’ wasn’t totally your fave TV show?”

“Why should it have been?”

“Rich girls, boarding school, Nancy McKeon... need I say more?” Rejeanne said with a smile that made Lindsay even more nervous.

“I loved ‘The Cosby Show,’” Lindsay finally admitted.

“I loved that show too!” Rejeanne announced. “I totally dug Mrs. Huxtable. What a classy lady. Why did you love it?”

“Because my father hated it,” was Lindsay’s response.

“Why would your dad hate a show about a doctor married to a lawyer?”

“Because they were black.”

“Oh.”

“It’s my dad, Rejeanne,” Lindsay added. “It’s not me.”

Rejeanne fell silent for a few moments, finally allowing herself to absorb all that she had learned about this magnificently beautiful but somewhat sad woman who sat across from her.

“Tell me about you, Rejeanne,” Lindsay spoke up.

“Me?”

“Yeah,” Lindsay said. “Are you from Dell Valley?”

Rejeanne smirked. “Honestly, Lindsay, is anyone really from Dell Valley?”

“True,” Lindsay conceded, considering that her parents, like most of the people of affluent Dell Valley, relocated there from other parts of the country.

“I was born in Milwaukee,” Rejeanne started. “Mom joint-majored in biochemistry and allied health at Marquette when Dad the grease monkey knocked her up. They had to do the right thing then, so they got married.”

“Are your folks from Milwaukee?”

“No,” Rejeanne replied. “Mom’s from Madison and Dad was raised on a farm about fifty

miles south of Eau Claire. Dad lives in Milwaukee now, but my grandparents still live on that farm. He grates my last nerve, but I do try to get up to the farm at least a couple of times in the summer to see the grandfolks. They're a riot. You'd love them."

A strange sensation traveled through Lindsay's body after that last comment. "So your parents married after you were conceived," she remarked after relaxing somewhat. "Are they still together?"

Rejeanne started laughing uncontrollably. "Oh, no, Mom dumped his ass before she got her degree. Being a single mom slowed her down, but she eventually graduated when I was five. Then she went to med school."

"Really? Where?" Lindsay queried.

"Wayne State University Medical School in Detroit," Rejeanne answered. "Mom and I lived in a townhouse on the massive campus of the Detroit Medical Center," she continued. "Detroit is eighty-eight percent African-American, you know. It was a real education being a part of that twelve percent."

"Was it terribly difficult?" Lindsay asked, finding herself thoroughly fascinated with Rejeanne.

"Naw, black people are much more receptive about the token white than the other way around. But if anyone did give me any shit, my core group of friends had my back. I learned how to break dance and do the "smurf." I listened to early rap... you know, Run DMC, Ghetto Boys, NWA. I played in abandoned houses in the Cass Corridor. Spent hours at the video arcades with my posse. It was way cool."

Rejeanne had Lindsay's full attention.

"Wayne State is right alongside Detroit's cultural haven. Mom and I spent many a weekend going to the various museums there; the Institute of Arts, the Science Center, and the African-American Cultural Center to name a few. There were also street fairs and art fairs aplenty. It was really important to her for me to embrace other cultures and heritages."

As Rejeanne spoke, Lindsay found herself noticing her coffee companion's hands.

"Sometimes bad shit happened. Our place got broken into once. One year, someone stole the cassette player out of Mom's car. I've seen a few drug busts go down. But I never saw all those stereotypically horrible things one hears about Detroit. Our neighbors were really tight-knit and looked after one another. The dude that 'B-and-E'd' our house was caught by one of our neighbors who was a burly off-duty firefighter. So, overall, I really loved living there."

Lindsay was specifically observing the elaborate ring on Rejeanne's left thumb.

"My best friend as a kid was this girl named Shanita Weams. I called her 'Neeta' and she called me 'Jeannie P.' She loved to braid my hair and play jacks. She lived with her grandma, Mrs. Turner because her mom had a nasty drug habit. I loved Mrs. Turner's sweet potato pie. I loved Mrs. Turner. What a genuine woman. She was always telling me to hold my head high. 'Don't let nobody cut you down, child,' she'd say. She commanded respect and told me to always do the same."

"It sounds like you had a very adventurous childhood, Rejeanne." Lindsay said. "Did you stay in Detroit through high school or college?"

"No," Rejeanne replied. "After med school, which Mom managed to do in four years I might add, and her residency in Detroit, she was really missing Wisconsin. So we came back when I was twelve. She returned to Madison and is practicing internal medicine now. That's where I went to junior high and high school."

"Did you go to the University of Wisconsin there?" Lindsay asked, impressed with just how proud Rejeanne was of her mother's accomplishments.

"No," Rejeanne replied. "I was totally bored with Madison. Too hippy white, I suppose. I did a year at Mom's alma mater and then transferred to DePaul in Chicago. How I ended up here in Dell Valley is still beyond me." Rejeanne looked at her hands.

Lindsay was looking at them again as well. "Rejeanne, do you play any sports?" For reasons unknown to her, Lindsay needed to ask that question.

Rejeanne's eyebrows rose. "A couple. Why?"

"I dunno," Lindsay replied honestly. "Just asking."

A tense silence fell upon both women that was quickly broken by the waitress. "Have you two decided on lunch yet?"

Lindsay found the waitress' tone rather rude until she looked at her watch. "Wow, we've been here for over two hours," she announced to Rejeanne.

"I guess that time really does fly when you're having fun," Rejeanne said to Lindsay before turning her attention to the waitress. "Well, shoot, I guess we should dilute all of this tea and latte in our respective bellies."

Both women decided on bagel sandwiches and salads for their lunch. While they ate, the conversation was reduced to small talk about the weather and current events. However, after wiping the last remnants of mayonnaise off her mouth, Lindsay was eager to return to the topic of Rejeanne. She wanted to learn more about this young reporter who was

captivating her.

“Tell me, Rejeanne, are you an only child?” she asked.

“Not really,” Rejeanne answered. “Mom eventually remarried but never had any more kids. Dad, on the other hand, remarried three times after he and Mom divorced. I have two half brothers from the second marriage, Devin and Haley, and a half sister from the third, Chelsea. Dad wasn't married long enough to wife number four to knock her up, but he has another son, Chase, by this chick that he was seeing on the side from wife number three.”

“Your dad sounds like a busy man.”

“Yeah, busy avoiding child support payments.”

Both women laughed together for the first time. Lindsay was instantly struck with an inexplicable urge to hold Rejeanne's pretty little hands that were busy crumpling a napkin.

“Are you close to any of your half siblings?” she asked in a desperate attempt to take her mind away from Rejeanne's tempting hands.

“I'm actually closer to my step-dad's daughter, Kira, from his first marriage. But I get along well with Devin and Haley.”

Rejeanne found herself eyeing Lindsay's lips and thinking how soft they must be. “How about you, Lindsay,” she said, breaking her private reverie, “are you close to anyone?”

Lindsay leaned in closer to Rejeanne. “To be honest, I've never really had any close 'girlfriends.’”

Rejeanne had to quickly define in her mind Lindsay's interpretation of that word.

“No one to braid my hair or play jacks with,” she continued. “I do have this cousin, however. His name is Keith. He lives in a loft in So-Ho. He's my closest friend. He's gay.”

Lindsay thought about why she had to reveal that last bit of information until Rejeanne's next comment nearly floored her.

“What a coincidence. I'm gay too.”

When Lindsay didn't react, Rejeanne became nervous but for only a moment. That old investigative reporter in her resurfaced. “I have a question for you, Lindsay.”

Lindsay's eyebrows rose and her stomach tightened. "Shouldn't your husband Martin be your closest friend rather than your cousin Keith?" Rejeanne asked.

Lindsay didn't respond, causing Rejeanne to feel as if her long interview-cum-brunch was going south really fast. "I guess that I've taken up enough of your time," she said as she flagged the waitress for the bill. "I didn't mean to pry."

When the waitress approached, Lindsay reached over to grab the check. Rejeanne grabbed Lindsay's hand. "I'll get this," she said to Lindsay.

Her hand is so soft, Lindsay thought. "No, I should get it. I'm the filthy rich one, remember?" she said.

"Like this bill's gonna break me," Rejeanne said with a smile. "I inconvenienced you. I should pay."

"It wasn't an inconvenience. I... I really enjoyed this."

"I'm pleased, Lindsay," Rejeanne said. "The article that I write will do this interview justice, I promise."

When the waitress returned with Rejeanne's change, both women stood and were able to get a full close up view of the other. While both timidly smiled, Rejeanne and Lindsay helped each other with their coats. "Thank you for the interview, Lindsay," Rejeanne said as she put on her gloves. "And sorry about rambling on so long."

"No, I thoroughly enjoyed talking with you. And please call me Lin."

"Groovy, Lin," Rejeanne said as she boldly chuckled. "My close friends call me Jeannie. You can call me Jeannie," she added as she lightheartedly nudged Lindsay's shoulder.

Lindsay smiled from ear to ear. "Thank you for a most invigorating brunch, Jeannie."

As Rejeanne turned to exit the coffeehouse, Lindsay gently grabbed her arm. "Can I, uh, can I maybe call you... to see how the article is coming along?" she asked.

"I'd like that, Lin."

CONTINUED IN CHAPTER THREE...