

JANUARY THAW

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Disclaimers: See Chapter One. Dell Valley, by the way, is a fictional town. Wisconsin, however, is a very real state. Ask any Packers fan. ☺

CHAPTER THREE

SILENCING HESTIA

It was 9:30 in the morning and Lindsay was finishing up a conference call in her massive corporate office located in the Alasdair Bank Building. She had already presided over two separate staff meetings and had taken two earlier overseas conference calls. This was all part of the business for Lindsay Alasdair-MacMahon. Work began promptly at eight, if not earlier, and the day didn't end until every task established in the A.M. was completed. It was not uncommon for her to work twelve to fourteen to eighteen-hour days. It was not uncommon for her to work weekends and holidays. This, after all, was her destiny.

The Alasdair family fortune had grown steadily with the times for over two centuries. Lindsay's earliest American ancestors were Welsh-born colonists who purchased land from the British government and resold it, in lots, to the newer colonial arrivals. By the dawn of the American Revolution, the Alasdairs had made a sizable profit from government purchases, as well as land grabbing, which was somewhat hindered, however, by King George III's taxation. Thus, when the new sovereign government looked inevitable, the Alasdairs keenly embraced the change; quickly establishing banks and brokering deals with some of the Founding Fathers and their contemporaries. From the very beginning, the Alasdairs knew how to take advantage of governing bodies and turn a profit from it.

Lindsay had taken the lessons she learned from her family history almost to perfection. Buying land globally from areas most thought to be too risky to invest, she researched the needs and resources of the areas and built based on those needs and resources, be it commercial or residential. Each new acquisition was economically advantageous to the area and to her corporate stronghold.

Lindsay's office door cracked open as she was removing the phone piece from her ear.

“Are you free, Ms. MacMahon?” It was Leigh Duquesne, Lindsay’s head administrative assistant.

“I am now,” Lindsay replied. “Come on in.”

Leigh approached carrying a stack of newspapers. “Your morning editions, Ma’am,” she said, as she gently placed the papers on Lindsay’s desk.

Lindsay thumbed past the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel and the Chicago Tribune to the Dell Valley Gazette.

“I should have placed that one on top, Ms. MacMahon,” Leigh said, “anticipating that you’d be interested in reading your interview.”

Lindsay immediately began reading Rejeanne’s article as Leigh quietly backed away from the desk before turning to leave the office. Just before shutting the door behind her, Leigh offered, “I read it. It’s very good.”

She raised the newspaper higher in front of her so as to prevent Leigh from glimpsing at her smile as she read. Rejeanne had done the interview “justice” as she had promised. Lindsay was almost in awe at just how well the article flowed. Rejeanne neither sugarcoated Lindsay’s persona nor did she present her as a cold corporate diva.

She was particularly struck by Rejeanne’s candor.

I must confess that I anticipated a brief self-serving interview from an almost unapproachable, powerful woman. I was very pleasantly surprised. In between sips of her herbal tea, which admittedly made me slightly self-conscious about the caffeine, sugar and cream I was putting in my body, Lindsay presented a charming and inquisitive woman who appeared more interested in my taste in late 80s prime-time TV shows than she was in revealing what manner she uses to invest her spare change or exfoliate the skin on that beautiful face of hers.

After reading the complete article twice, Lindsay put on her telephone headpiece and called her assistant.

“Hold all of my calls for the next half hour,” she said to Leigh. She then literally watched her right index finger as it slowly pressed the “out” button on her phone, allowing her to place a call outside of the company’s communications network.

* * * *

After the exclusive interview with Lindsay, Rejeanne wasted no time in composing her article. Feverishly typing, she refused to leave her computer until she had finished her masterpiece, read it, spell-checked it, read it again, spell-checked it again and read it again. As she submitted her work to the copy editor, her heart pounded in her chest. She was not able to relax until she had received word that the final editing of the article had been done. To her delight, very few editing changes were necessary.

At eight o'clock in the morning the following day, she was in the office of Christopher Dutton, the newspaper's managing editor, receiving the praise that she had waited five long years to hear.

"Your coverage of the fundraiser was very good, Jeannie," Dutton said. "But that interview with Lindsay Alasdair was a stroke of genius, literally and figuratively."

"Thank you, sir," Rejeanne replied.

"I'm still in awe that she allowed the interview in the first place," he continued. "Do you know how many times we've tried to get her say something more than a ten-syllable quote?"

"No sir."

"Let's just say that there are a few of us here who would have given our left nut to get what you got."

Rejeanne smiled at the chief editor. "Well, sir, maybe it's for the best that I did it," she said. "Taking my left ovary would have been far more complicated and invasive."

Dutton laughed as he stood up. Rejeanne stood as well. "Well, I hope that you didn't promise her your first born," he said as he took the hand of the young reporter and shook it. "Good job, Jeannie-P."

"Thanks, Mr. Dutton."

For the next hour, Rejeanne sat at her desk as coworkers approached and friends called to laud her article. Although very appreciative of the multitude of praise that she was receiving, the one person from whom she wished to hear the most had not telephoned. *She said that she would call me to check up,* Rejeanne said in her mind over and over again that morning as her level of disappointment increased. Thus, by ten o'clock, she was ready to be as far away from her phone as possible. Looking over at the cubicle of the courthouse beat reporter, she stood and approached the woman in it typing on her computer.

"Say, Beck," Rejeanne said. "Want to take a break and get some coffee?"

“Sure,” Becky Schaff replied.

Just then, a voice from behind the women spoke up.

“Jeannie, you got a call.” It was Doris the receptionist.

“You might want to take that,” Becky stated.

“Naw,” Rejeanne said to Becky before responding to Doris. “Put it on my voicemail, Dor.”

“I don’t think so, dear,” Doris responded. “It’s Lindsay Alasdair-MacMahon.”

“Holy shit!” Becky exclaimed. “Yeah, you better get that, JP.”

Rejeanne sprinted back to her desk, but hesitated in picking up the phone.” *What if she hated it... Oh my God, she hated it... Shit shit shit shit shit...*

“She’s holding, Jeannie!” Doris announced.

“For the love of Christ, pick it up!” Becky cried out as others started grouping around Rejeanne’s cubicle.

“Can I get some fucking privacy here, guys!?!”

As bodies turned away, Rejeanne sat down and finally lifted her receiver. “Hello... Rejeanne Piscard here.”

“Hi, Jeannie. It’s Lin.”

She doesn’t sound pissed. This is good so far. “Hi Lin. How’s your morning?”

“Pretty awesome,” Lindsay replied. “I loved the article. Thank you.”

Rejeanne heaved a sigh and leaned back in her chair. *Thank you, Jesus.* “I’m glad you did. I worked very hard to get it right. I wanted to capture you as I saw you.”

“Like a painter capturing his subject on canvas, but your brush is your pen... or your laptop, so to speak,” Lindsay said.

“Exactly,” Rejeanne replied. “I’m so very glad that you enjoyed reading it. I was worried that you were going to think that it sucked.”

Lindsay laughed. “It didn’t suck.”

* * * *

The two women talked on the phone for well over an hour that day. After dispensing the pleasantries of their experience from the day before, the two began to share more intimate details of each other's lives. Lindsay learned in that first phone conversation that Rejeanne majored in journalism and minored in philosophy at DePaul. She also learned that Rejeanne studied dance, kick boxing and Tae-Bo on her free time, broke her leg water-skiing when she was 14, made a wicked chicken-broccoli-cheese casserole and hated Britney Spears. Rejeanne learned that Lindsay competed in gymnastics and swimming in high school, lettered in fencing at Dartmouth, was an accomplished equestrian, hated Andy Rooney and ripped her side open jumping a fence when she 16.

"OUCH!" Rejeanne shouted. "That sounds like it really hurt."

"It did."

"What the hell were you doing jumping a fence in the first place?"

"It's kind of silly, Jeannie," Lindsay said. "I'm too embarrassed to tell."

"Oh, come on," Rejeanne pleaded. "I want to hear it."

"Well, okay," Lindsay said, sighing. "As you know, I did gymnastics. And I'm, like, five-feet-eleven."

"Yeah, I've noticed." Rejeanne remarked, picturing in her mind that tall, sleek body.

"Okay, so there was this five-foot fence near the school's faculty parking lot and I, uh, I wanted to dive over it."

"Like pole vaulting?"

"Yeah, but face forward and without a vaulting pole."

"That's insane, Lin! What compelled you to try that?"

"I don't know," Lindsay replied. "I was sixteen and not in touch with my own mortality."

"Well, I bet that you and your mortality became intimately acquainted after that day," Rejeanne commented.

"Not really," Lindsay stated. "After I healed somewhat, I did it again."

"You are insane!"

“Perhaps, but second time’s a charm. I cleared it with room to spare,” Lindsay boasted.

“Whoa!” was all Rejeanne could say.

Lindsay and Rejeanne enjoyed that first phone conversation so much that several more followed over the subsequent days. Lindsay was very mindful of the fact that she was calling Rejeanne at work, so the two would talk during her lunch hour. Lindsay enjoyed talking with her new friend far too much to allow the occasional sound of chewing bother her. After the first few days, Lindsay, who rarely took a lunch, started utilizing the time to eat as well. This, of course, led the conversations in the direction of food.

“So, do you have a most favorite FAVORITE food?” Rejeanne asked.

“Calamari,” Lindsay replied. “Call me weird, but I just love calamari. I dig almost all seafood, though. Calamari’s just my favorite. How about you?”

“I love to eat, period, so I can’t pin down a single food,” Rejeanne stated. “But Chicago-style deep-dish pizza, Chicago-style all-beef hot dogs, “Ben & Jerry’s” chocolate chip cookie dough ice cream and a good dive burger rank up there.”

“Dive burger?” Lindsay inquired.

“You know, one of those juicy grilled burgers that you can only get at a run down corner pub... a dive.”

“Oh.”

The conversations about food eventually led into conversations about movies.

“Is there a specific genre you prefer?” Lindsay asked.

“Not really,” Rejeanne responded. “The only genre that I totally cannot stand is Jackie Chan kung fu action stuff.”

“I would think that you’d like that, being that you’re into kick boxing and all.” Lindsay remarked.

“Oh, ‘Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon’ was awesome,” Rejeanne said. “I just don’t like that silly b-movie drivel. How about you?”

“Lifetime Original Movies.”

“But those are made-for-TV movies, Lin.”

“Hey, I didn’t specify TV versus theatrical release when I posed the question,” Lindsay

replied. "I just asked about genres."

"Yeah, but do 'Lifetime Original Movies' count as an entire genre?"

"In my book they do," Lindsay replied. "I call 'em the 'Lifetime, Television for Victims' genre."

The conversations about movies eventually led into conversations about actors.

"I think that Gregory Peck and Cary Grant were class acts," Rejeanne said.

"From Hollywood's golden era, I'm partial to Humphrey Bogart," Lindsay remarked. "How about today?"

"Let's see," Rejeanne started. "I totally love Susan Sarandon, Halle Berry, Jodie Foster, Russell Crowe, Denzel Washington and Tom Hanks. They have such range and depth in their performances. Call me crazy, but I've dug pretty much everything Winona Ryder's been in too."

"Hmmm..."

"Yeah, she's a convicted felon, but I don't care. 'Heathers' rules."

"I love Sigourney Weaver," Lindsay said. "I suppose it's a tall chick thing."

"Then you had to have seen 'Alien Resurrection,'" Rejeanne remarked.

"Eight times," Lindsay replied. "And I'm sure that you've seen it as well."

"Oh yeah," Rejeanne said. "So, what do you make of the 'Ripley-Call' relationship in that film, Lin?"

"I'd say that it was sexually subtextual."

The conversations about actors eventually led into conversations about drugs.

"So you mean to tell me that you've NEVER tried any narcotic?" Rejeanne asked astonished.

"Only once, but rather by accident," Lindsay replied. "During my sophomore year at Dartmouth, I was doing a lot of dorm parties and pub crawling. I was becoming quite the alcoholic, actually. It was a difficult year for me, Jeannie, but I digress. Anyway, I was at this party at Streeter Hall one night, drunk, and this guy persuaded me to chew on what looked like a sheet of stamps. It was LSD.

“Oh, God,” Rejeanne interjected. “Trippin’ while drunk. That’s scary.”

“You aren’t kidding, Jeannie,” Lindsay stated. “After an entire night of watching big purple roaches climbing a florescent wall and then two subsequent days of praying to the porcelain goddess, I swore off all liquor and drugs.”

“So you’re an herbal tea-totaler now?”

“I’ll have a glass of wine with dinner,” Lindsay replied. “But I don’t touch hard liquor.”

After a few seconds of strained silence between the two women, Lindsay’s monumental curiosity broke it.

“So, uh, do you, uh... what is your experience with drugs,” she asked Rejeanne, almost afraid of the answer.

“Unfortunately, I’ve sampled nearly everything,” Rejeanne replied. “No heroin, meth or crack, but I’ve tried acid, shrooms, special k, ‘e’, and snorted powdered blow. Didn’t particularly like any of them, so don’t worry. I never developed any nasty habits.”

“I’m relieved to hear,” Lindsay said with a light sigh. “How about alcohol?”

“Never got into drinking. I keep beer stocked at the crib for friends during football season. Like you, I do enjoy wine on occasion, but I can honestly say that I’ve never been three sheets to the wind.”

“That’s good.”

“Uh, I do smoke weed on occasion...” Rejeanne added hesitatingly. “...but not a lot. Does that bother you?”

Lindsay felt an oddly immediate surge of both flattery and concern. “Um, I guess not,” she said. “As long as you know that you aren’t smoking it for the wrong reasons.”

The conversations about drugs eventually led into arguments about politics.

“I hate the Republican Party for a boatload of reasons,” Rejeanne said, “but you know what I most hate about **you** Republicans?”

“What?”

“Your inability to keep your fucking noses out of my fucking bedroom.”

“Not all Republicans are preoccupied with the issues expressed by the religious right, Jeannie,” Lindsay countered.

“Oh yeah,” Rejeanne said. “Well, the biggest mouths with the deepest pockets in that party seem to be.”

“That’s a tad bit stereotypical, Rejeanne,” Lindsay stated angrily.

A harshly edgy silence seeped over the telephone conversation, but only for a minute.

“You know what I hate most about **you** Democrats?” Lindsay asked.

“What, our penchant for oral sex?”

“No,” Lindsay replied. “Your penchant for taking the hard-earned tax dollars of working stiff Joe Normal and giving it to welfare mamma so that she can buy her kids their \$100 Adidas shoes and keep up her \$200 a week hairdo.”

“Well, shit,” Rejeanne said. “That’s a tad bit stereotypical, Lindsay Alasdair-MacMahon.”

And of course, the arguments about politics eventually led into conversations about sex.

“Okay, Lindsay, how old were you when you got your cherry busted... and I want details.”

“I don’t know about this, Jeannie,” Lindsay replied. “I’m talking to a reporter. You’re not going to sell this info to the National Enquirer, are you?”

“Now there’s an idea,” Rejeanne said, jokingly. “I can take it to them, and then I’m sure that you’ll pay double the fee to buy my silence. I can then pay off my student loans and my car and have money left over to do that weekend at Six Flags that I’ve been dreaming about. Su-weet! So start talking.”

“Well, since my money’s going to go to such good use, I’ll oblige,” Lindsay quipped. “I was sixteen.”

“Sixteen was a banner year for you.”

“I suppose,” Lindsay said, continuing. “Anyway, it was one time and then I didn’t experience sex again until I was a junior at Dartmouth.”

“That bad, huh?”

“Neither one of us knew what we were doing.”

“And the Dartmouth experience?”

Lindsay sighed. “He was my first real boyfriend. His name was Nadir Balaji and he was from New Delhi. We had a really intense love affair.”

“What happened?” Rejeanne asked.

“My father happened,” Lindsay declared.

“But you were a junior in college, Lin,” Rejeanne said. “What were you, like, 21?”

“Oh, Dad didn’t get to me, Jeannie,” Lindsay stated. “I would have told him to go get fucked. He scared Nadir away.”

“How?”

“Threatened to go to the INS and have Nadir’s student visa revoked.”

“He couldn’t do that,” Rejeanne asked, “could he?”

“My father has connections in the Justice Department, so yeah, he could.”

“I’m sorry, Lin.”

“Don’t be,” Lindsay said in a matter-of-fact tone that Rejeanne could sense over the phone. “So how about you? When was your first encounter?”

“Do you want to know about my first time with a man or with a woman?” Rejeanne asked.

Lindsay had never been confronted with that question before. “I, uh, don’t know,” she said.

“With a dude, I was a senior in high school,” Rejeanne started. “His name was Ronnie Deichmann and we were best buds. We both hung with the alternative grunge crowd. You know, the skateboarding, clove cigarette smoking, ripped cargo pants wearing dweebs. Anyway, Ronnie and I were hanging out in his basement one night, smoking pot and listening to Nirvana when we started making out. Next thing you know, we were naked on the moldy couch he had down there.”

“Did you enjoy it?” Lindsay asked.

“Hell no,” Rejeanne replied. “When he was done... after about four minutes... I got up and told him that I was never doing that again. Blew his ego pretty bad.”

“But Jeannie, sexual intercourse usually hurts women for the first time. It can get better.”

“It wasn’t that, Lin,” Rejeanne remarked. “I experienced a void. It was as if I had just drunk a glass of sand. It felt wrong for **me**.”

There was a lengthy silence in the conversation while Lindsay contemplated what she had just been told and how she would ask the question that torched her curiosity. “So, uh, with a woman... when did you...”

“...Munch on the Stainmaster?” Rejeanne chimed in.

“Excuse me?”

“Be with a woman. Go down on a woman. MUFF DIVE.”

Lindsay cleared her very dry throat. “Uh, yes, I suppose.”

“This is totally freaking you out, isn’t it, Lin?”

“N... no, um, I’m okay.”

“Nada when I was at Marquette freshman year,” Rejeanne started. “But when I got to DePaul... su-whee... I was a dyke in heat.”

Lindsay cleared her throat again.

“Sophomore year, I played on the college softball and women’s rugby teams. My first experience was with a girl name Kirsten VanderPloeg. Her nickname was ‘Tank’ and she drove like one, if you know what I mean. My first real girlfriend was a criminal justice major. Her name was Josephine Clark, but everyone called her Jo.”

“How long were you together?”

“Almost two years,” Rejeanne said. “We decided that we were better off as friends... and we still are. She’s a Chicago cop now.”

At that moment, Rejeanne noticed that her lunch hour was about to end. She had enjoyed her lunchtime chats with Lindsay. She even enjoyed their sometimes-heated political debates. But she longed for more. They had not actually seen each other since the interview. So, summoning up courage that she hoped she had, Rejeanne decided to throw caution to the wind as she put forward a proposal that she had been contemplating for days.

“Lin,” she started, “would you, uh, might you be interested in maybe getting together to, uh, I don’t know, hang out, watch a flick on DVD or something... or am I being too forward?”

Lindsay was grateful that Rejeanne couldn't see her level of excitement at the proposal. "Sure, Jeannie. I mean, no, you're not being too forward and, yes, I'd love to get together and hang out with you sometime."

"What are you doing Thursday evening?" Rejeanne asked. "Must-see TV will be reruns all that night."

"Let me check my calendar," Lindsay said before retrieving her pocket PC and calling up her calendar. *Why am I bothering with this?* she asked herself. *I'll make myself free.* "I don't seem to have any commitments that evening," she lied, totally disregarding a business dinner that she had scheduled with Martin and two of her major corporate shareholders.

"Great!" Rejeanne said. "Come to my place. I don't have servants up the yin-yang, a tennis court or an indoor swimming pool, but I have beer and wine in the fridge, a comfy couch, and a wide screen TV. And since you like fish, I'll conjure up something... uh, fishy... for you to eat."

"Where do you live, Jeannie?"

"Valley Grove Condominiums."

Once she secured directions to Rejeanne's home and agreed on a time, Lindsay said her farewell to her friend. After disconnecting, she leaned back and stared up at the ceiling for the longest time, thinking about everything that had transpired in the last few days. She had a friend, a genuine adult female friend. Rejeanne was someone who wasn't concerned about sucking up to Lindsay, manipulating her or cashing in on her wealth. But Lindsay knew that there was something more. She was attracted to this spirited young woman; attracted to her independence, her determination, and her spunk. She was also attracted to Rejeanne's honesty and her conviction in her beliefs. And yes, Lindsay was attracted to Rejeanne's body: her curves, her lovely face, her melodic voice and her pretty hands. She dared not allow herself to think about sex. She was married, she respected Rejeanne entirely too much and she was not really like that.

Am I?

After her long moments of quiet reflection, Lindsay dialed her husband. "Martin," she said. "I'm canceling dinner with Tachman and Rosen Thursday night."

CONTINUED IN CHAPTER FOUR...

