

## **JANUARY THAW**

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### **CHAPTER FOUR**

#### **CONCERT OF THE SIRENS**

Lindsay spent the entire afternoon of that distinctive Thursday at various specialty-clothing stores along the main fashion strip in downtown Dell Valley. She had not allowed herself the joy of wearing denim for over five years, mainly because an occasion had not presented itself where jeans would have been appropriate. Now, however, she was anticipating the evening with her new friend, Rejeanne, and it was important for her to look as casual and comfortable as possible. Thus, after having tried on several pairs of high-end designer jeans, she decided on three styles of Levis. Purchasing some casual blouses and sweaters and even a couple of t-shirts would follow. Amazed at just how little she ended up spending, Lindsay smiled at the prospect of what awaited her.

She arrived at Rejeanne's condo complex several minutes early. For reasons unknown to her, she was quite nervous about simply parking her vehicle and approaching Rejeanne's front door. Thus, she spent those minutes slowly driving around the complex, playing around in her mind with what she would say and do once that door opened.

"Hey, Lin," Rejeanne said after answering her doorbell. "Right on time."

"Hi," Lindsay replied as she entered and handed Rejeanne a lovely bouquet of flowers. "For you."

"Thank you, Lin," Rejeanne cheerily said as she took the bouquet. "You're so sweet. Here, let me take your coat," she added.

"Thanks," Lindsay replied as she bent down to remove her boots. "It smells wonderful in here. What scent is that?"

"It's the scent of warm vanilla coming from my burning candles," Rejeanne answered. "I needed to drown out the fish smell from the dinner that I cooked for you."

"You didn't have to cook me dinner, Jeannie."

“I know.”

Lindsay followed Rejeanne into her small but cozy kitchen and immediately began eyeing the various magnets and photos on Rejeanne’s refrigerator.

“Pretty busy fridge door, huh?” Rejeanne remarked, embarrassed.

“No, I think that it’s quite interesting,” Lindsay replied as she closed in on one photo in particular. “When was this picture of you taken?” she asked as she noticed the differences in Rejeanne’s hairstyle and clothing.

“That was taken in college,” Rejeanne replied. “About six or seven years ago. I sported a mullet back then, but only for about a year.”

“Who’s the woman in the picture with you?”

“That’s my buddy, Jo.”

“Didn’t you date her?”

“She’s an old ex, yeah.”

“You didn’t tell me that your ex, uh, friend was a black lady.”

“One, you didn’t ask,” Rejeanne replied defensively, “and two, does it matter?”

“No,” Lindsay said, immediately realizing how her statement must have resonated with Rejeanne. “I didn’t mean to sound... she’s very pretty. I can see why you would, you know, go out with her.”

“Well, Jo wasn’t my last girlfriend,” Rejeanne said. “The last one, who is very white I might add, is a long story that you wouldn’t want to hear and I don’t particularly want to tell.”

“That bad?”

“That bad.”

Rejeanne thought that, at that moment, presenting her main course to Lindsay was in order. Bending over to open her stove, she pulled out two large perfectly baked and seasoned lake perch and offered them to a wide-eyed Lindsay.

“They look absolutely delicious!” Lindsay said, trying to maintain composure.

“I hope that they taste absolutely delicious to you as well.”

Dinner for the two women went almost flawlessly. Along with the meal of perch, baked potatoes, vegetables, French bread dinner rolls and Chardonnay, the two women enjoyed stimulating conversation that included more detailed information about Rejeanne's past dating life. As Lindsay was asking questions, she began feeling a strange sensation... jealousy.

"You've gone out with a lot of women, Jeannie," she commented.

"I wouldn't call six since the age of eighteen a lot, Lin," Rejeanne replied. "Hell, some straight girls that I knew in college dated that many men and more each semester."

"Perhaps, but did they, you know... did they, did you..."

"...Sleep with all of them?"

Lindsay could only nod.

"No, Lin," Rejeanne said. "I'm not a 'ho.' Just like straight girls, lesbians go out on casual dates. We don't just fuck everything and anything that shows us a little attention."

Lindsay was instantly relieved. "I certainly didn't mean to imply promiscuity," she said. "I just find it hard to believe that someone as... as energetic and, um, attractive as you wouldn't have found that special person eons ago."

Rejeanne smiled. "Who's to say that I still won't?"

Lindsay felt butterflies in her stomach.

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After dinner, the women wandered into Rejeanne's living room. Having both polished off the first bottle of wine between them, Rejeanne opened up the second while Lindsay looked over the collection of DVDs.

"Anything interest you?" Rejeanne asked.

Lindsay pulled out two. "I've never seen this movie," she lifted up one DVD, "or this one."

"'Monster's Ball' is excellent," Rejeanne remarked, "and Halle Berry is awesome in it, but the movie's a downer." She grabbed the other DVD from Lindsay. "'Girl, Interrupted,' on the other hand, has some pretty dramatic highs and lows. Much more upbeat overall though."

"Well, this isn't fair," Lindsay said. "We should watch a movie that neither of us has seen. Won't watching one of these movies again bore you?"

“Hell, no,” Rejeanne replied. “I can watch a good movie over and over. I have absolutely no problem with sitting through either film again. I’ve already seen them both at least twice already. I’m surprised at you, Miss I’ve-Seen-‘Alien-Resurrection’-Eight-Times.”

Lindsay smiled. “So, which one?” she asked.

“You decide.”

“‘Girl, Interrupted.’”

As Rejeanne poured more wine, Lindsay made herself comfortable on Rejeanne's couch and looked around the living room of the condo. She thought to herself just how comfortable and well-decorated Rejeanne’s home appeared and how relaxed she was in her surroundings. As Lindsay pondered, she also came to the realization that she had not revealed much about herself to Rejeanne. Lindsay wondered both if Rejeanne wanted to ask questions but was too afraid of sounding reporter-like or if she was simply not interested at all in knowing anything about Lindsay.

As Rejeanne sat down beside Lindsay and handed her the glass of wine, she gently grabbed Rejeanne’s hand. “Is there anything else about me that you’d like to know?”

Rejeanne’s eyes widened at the question. “Sure,” she replied. “I know that it’s been at least five years, since I don’t ever recall reading about any announcement in the paper.” She took a deep breath. “Okay, so just how long have you been married?”

“It’ll be nine years this spring,” Lindsay replied.

“That’s a pretty long time,” Rejeanne remarked. “Why don’t you have any kids?”

“I don’t have time for children.” Lindsay’s comment came out too quickly.

Rejeanne turned her body toward Lindsay. “Help me here,” she began. “How can you not have time for kids? You’re a multi multi-millionaire. Hell, you could probably live your lifetime over and over twenty times and not have to earn an extra dollar and you’d still be living good.”

“What’s your point?”

“What exactly do you do that you couldn’t find time to raise a family?”

“You know what I do,” Lindsay said as a smoldering anger began to surface. “You interviewed me, remember?”

“You buy and sell major commercial real estate and own big companies...blah blah blah,” Rejeanne said. “So, couldn’t that be a basic nine-to-five operation if you allowed it?”

“No, it can’t,” Lindsay pronounced. “I’ve built **my** corporate stronghold in ten years to four times the size that it was when my father ran things and twenty times the size it was at the end of World War II. This didn’t happen because I ‘allowed’ a basic nine-to-five operation. Is that help enough?”

Rejeanne was somewhat stunned by Lindsay’s heated tone, but persisted. “But Lin, just how huge does the Alasdair fortune need to be before it’s big enough?”

Lindsay had never been directly challenged with that question. Of course, her family fortune was large enough for her, her husband, and any children they might have to live out in fulfilling wealth. Of course, she could quit working tomorrow and her lifestyle would not be compromised one bit. But in Lindsay’s mind, Rejeanne was missing the point. Building the corporate stronghold was never about money to Lindsay. It was and had always been about gaining more power.

“I had an important meeting this evening that I canceled to be here with you,” Lindsay remarked, dodging Rejeanne’s question.

“I certainly didn’t mean to take you away from an important function,” Rejeanne said, “but if my memory serves me correctly, you told me that you would be free this evening.”

Lindsay took a deep breath, realizing that she had allowed herself to speak before thinking. “So I did,” she said as she relaxed her shoulders. “Perhaps it wasn’t all that important after all.”

Rejeanne smiled, relieved that the tension of the last few minutes was quickly fading. “Yeah,” she said. “What can be more important than Winona and Angelina in the nuthouse together?”

Both women laughed. “Of course, adding Whoopi to the mix can only make it more palatable,” Lindsay added, noticing on the back of the DVD cover that Whoopi Goldberg also appeared in the film.

“Damned important, I’d say,” Rejeanne remarked before taking a hearty gulp of her wine and hitting “play” on her DVD player remote.

During the movie, Lindsay found herself fighting tears during the more somber scenes. This surprised her, since she was not one to cry easily. Oftentimes as well, she found herself looking out of the corner of her left eye at Rejeanne, who displayed a range of emotions during the course of the film. Rejeanne would openly cry or laugh appropriately, which further stunned Lindsay, given the number of times Rejeanne had

already seen the movie. During the last scene, when Winona Ryder's character, Susanna Kaysen, was saying her goodbyes to first her friends at the psychiatric hospital and then to Whoopi Goldberg's character, Nurse Valerie, Lindsay was no longer able to suppress the tears that began slowly draining from her eyes. Rejeanne looked over at her new friend, happy that the oh-so-stoic Lindsay Alasdair-MacMahon did, in fact, have both a heart and a soul. *I was beginning to doubt the existence of either*, she thought as she slowly, shyly reached over and grabbed her friend's slightly trembling hand. Embarrassed for only a moment, Lindsay squeezed the hand that held hers. They remained that way for the entire rolling of the credits.

Not really wanting to release Lindsay's hand, but feeling awkward for still holding it, Rejeanne stood while gently freeing her grip and wandered over to the refrigerator to open a third bottle of Chardonnay.

"Ready for more?" she announced as she popped the cork.

"Sure," Lindsay replied, not remotely concerned that she had already consumed more wine than she ever had before. "This is excellent wine."

"Thank you, Lin," Rejeanne said. "I'm more of a fruitier, sweeter wine taster myself. Give me a bottle of Riunite D'Oro and I'm good. But the first time that I saw you, I said to myself, 'self, this woman is a California Chardonnay sipper.' So I went over to Marty's Wine and Spirits on First Avenue and the dude there told me that the '99 Clos Du Bois Alexander Valley Reserve was a favorite in the Alasdair home. Looked at the price and almost fainted. I hope that this slightly less expensive swill, care-of Ernest and Julio Gallo, suffices."

Lindsay chuckled. "I'm drinking it up just fine, aren't I?"

"Yep, you are."

As Rejeanne returned to her place on the couch, the two women discussed the movie for a while before returning to the issue of Lindsay. "So, anything else about me you need to know?" Lindsay asked.

Rejeanne looked skyward and rubbed her chin dramatically. "Let's see, married nine years," she said, recapping, "no time for kids, and has this Donald Trump the-bigger-the-better thing going."

Lindsay smirked.

"Tell me about your husband, Lin."

"What do you want to know about him?"

“Is he a nice guy?” Rejeanne queried. “Does he make you laugh?” She leaned closer to Lindsay. “Is he a stallion?” she added lightheartedly.

Lindsay leaned back, flabbergasted. “I don’t see where that’s any of your business.”

“You’re right, it isn’t,” Rejeanne said. “I didn’t mean to offend, but you did open the door, Lin. And we’ve shared so much in such a short period of time that I didn’t think you’d mind. Is that what I get for thinking?”

Lindsay looked down at her hands that rested tensely on her lap. “No, but I really don’t feel comfortable with discussing certain aspects of my marriage. I’m sorry for snapping at you.”

“Fair enough, Lin,” Rejeanne stated as she gently caressed Lindsay’s left shoulder. “I apologize too.”

Lindsay looked up and into Rejeanne’s eyes. They held each other’s gaze for what seemed an eternity to both. There was a part of Lindsay that wanted to share her marriage with Rejeanne. She trusted that this woman would listen attentively, remark aptly and not pass any judgment. She eagerly wanted Rejeanne to know her, but she also had major reservations about exposing herself. In Lindsay’s mind, parts of her marriage to Martin were too vulnerable.

And, Rejeanne was still a newspaper reporter.

As Lindsay gazed into Rejeanne’s eyes, she began to feel something else. Rejeanne’s eyes were so bright and beautiful to her. Her face was so lovely. Her lips were so full and rosy. Startled by those feelings, Lindsay broke the glance by looking away.

“I hope that he makes you happy, Lin,” Rejeanne commented. “You deserve to be happy.”

Lindsay diffidently returned her glare at Rejeanne. “Are you happy, Jeannie?”

“Most times,” Rejeanne replied. “I have some pretty cool friends, I dig my job and I like my place. Living in snooty, uptight Dell Valley can be a drag sometimes, but when I need to getaway, I hook up with friends and cruise down to Milwaukee or even Chicago.”

“What about a girlfriend?” Lindsay asked.

“Why, you got someone in mind?” Rejeanne joked, causing Lindsay to squirm in her place on the couch.

*She's so uncomfortable right now*, Rejeanne thought as she pondered where she could go with the conversation. "So, you were born in the Big Apple, yes?" she asked, deciding on a topic that had a sure-fire safety mechanism.

"Yup."

"You don't have an East Coast accent, so I suspect you weren't raised there," Rejeanne noted. "Am I right?"

"Mom, Dad, and I lived in New York City until I was about six," Lindsay stated. "I remember the place. It was a large townhouse-style mansion off Central Park East, near the Guggenheim. Dad loved the primo location, but Mom hated living in Manhattan. Too busy and dirty for her. She's from upstate New York and really wanted me to be raised there. They fought about it for a long time, until Dad got a tip about some prime real estate here in Wisconsin. After purchasing about eighty percent of the commercial property of Dell Valley, which was then just a small and trendy summer getaway for the Chicago, Milwaukee, and Twin City wealthy, he talked Mom into relocating us here. She was okay with that because it beat staying in Manhattan."

"So you were raised here."

"Only until age eleven and then after that, only during the summers and holidays," Lindsay said. "I attended a boarding school in Connecticut starting in the sixth grade."

"Bummer."

"It wasn't too bad, Jeannie," Lindsay stated. "At least I wasn't around much to watch my parents' marriage fall apart."

"I know that they're divorced," Rejeanne commented. "The Alasdairs' personal lives are basic Dell Valley 101 requirement of the newspaper staff. How old were you when they split?"

"Fourteen."

"Did you take it pretty hard?"

"Not really," Lindsay responded. "Dad was never really in the picture to begin with, so there was nothing to miss."

"I get the distinct impression that you really don't get along well with your father, Lin," Rejeanne observed.

"He's an condescending, bigoted, narcissistic prick," Lindsay heatedly pronounced.

"Whoa!" Rejeanne exclaimed.

“Didn’t mean to dump that on you, Jeannie,” Lindsay said. “It’s just that he was never really a father to me except to remind me constantly of my position in this world as an ‘Alasdair.’”

“I would think that that’d be a good thing, being an Alasdair,” Rejeanne remarked. “He’s proud of the family, sounds like.”

“It’s not just pride, Jeannie. It’s power and control. As an Alasdair, I **had to** receive the best education, continue in the family business, marry a fellow Ivy League WASP and hopefully bear children to carry on the legacy. There was no other path in life for me.”

“And you’ve almost fulfilled your obligation, Lin.”

“Exactly,” Lindsay said. “My obligation.”

Rejeanne soothingly placed her hand back on Lindsay’s shoulder. “If you hadn’t been stifled with the expectations of your heritage, would you have done something different with your life?”

Lindsay nearly choked on her wine. No one had ever asked this of her before; not Martin, not even Keith. “Don’t get me wrong,” Lindsay finally said. “I love what I do. I’m good at it. But if I could have... would have chosen a different path, I would’ve wanted it to involve philanthropy.”

“But you are a philanthropist,” Rejeanne said. “Your family foundation donates tons of money to worthy causes every year.”

“Yes, but I do that work mostly from either here in Dell Valley or our other corporate offices in New York and Bethesda, Maryland,” Lindsay responded. “I’ve traveled extensively on business, but I would find it much more rewarding to travel to troubled areas, both here and abroad, doing something, anything to make the peoples of those areas have better lives.”

In that moment, Rejeanne really wanted to hug Lindsay, partly as a comfort but also because she was feeling very close to her. Suppressing that urge, she instead looked apprehensively at her watch. Lindsay noticed her doing that. “It’s late,” Lindsay announced. “I should go.”

“No, I wasn’t trying to imply anything,” Rejeanne stated. “I... I just didn’t know how to respond to your wonderful last statement. I... I was speechless, if you can believe that,” she chuckled nervously. “I think it’s great that you are so compassionate.”

Lindsay smiled. “I really should get going,” she said. “It’s late and I’m sure that you have to be at work early tomorrow.” She rose and padded over to the door to put on her boots. “Thank you very much for a most wonderful evening.”

Rejeanne jumped up and sprinted to the closet to retrieve Lindsay's coat. After helping her put it on, Rejeanne opened her door and both woman looked on in horror at the heavy snowstorm outside.

"I don't think that you should drive home in this, Lin," Rejeanne announced.

"My vehicle has four-wheel drive," Lindsay replied. "I'll be okay."

"It's not that, Lin. You've been drinking. I'm sure that that sweet-looking Hummer H2 out there has a kick-ass navigational system, but it still can't drive you home."

"I'm not drunk, Jeannie."

"I'm not saying that you are," Rejeanne said. "But I do believe that you'd be driving impaired after sharing almost three whole bottles of wine with me."

As Lindsay opened her mouth to speak, Rejeanne placed her hands on Lindsay's upper arms. "Please..." she said. "Stay here."

Lindsay again looked deeply into Rejeanne's eyes as a whirlwind of thoughts coursed through her foggy mind. "Perhaps you're right," she stated, trying desperately to repress the more sexual notions.

Rejeanne was also dealing with her own demons. She desperately wanted to lie down with Lindsay. They didn't necessarily have to have sex, but Rejeanne had fantasized several times over the course of the evening the idea of curling up with Lindsay in an intimate embrace. She wondered what Lindsay looked like under her blouse and jeans and imagined that it was quite sultry.

*Down, girl,* she thought. "You can have my bed, Lin," she said, blaming her wicked thoughts on the wine. "It's a queen size. The one in my spare bedroom is only a daybed. I suspect that you and those long legs of yours would be much more comfortable in the bigger bed."

"I don't want to put you out, Jeannie."

"No big thing," Rejeanne assured. "I'm cool."

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Being the perfect hostess, Rejeanne gave Lindsay a fresh towel and washcloth, a new toothbrush still in the packaging, and the largest nightshirt she had. After Lindsay undressed, Rejeanne also insisted on washing her friend's clothes so that she would have clean and fresh attire to wear home the next morning. Rejeanne even gave Lindsay some magazines to read while she did the small load of laundry.

Lindsay, not wanting to feel like a burden, eventually padded downstairs to the kitchen and loaded the dirty dishes into Rejeanne's dishwasher and wiped down the kitchen counter and dining room table. Then, finding her way into Rejeanne's utility room, she waited with her friend for the dryer to finish.

For the most part, the two women waited in silence. Rejeanne was trying dreadfully hard not to look too provocatively at Lindsay, who wore a "Dilbert" nightshirt and nothing else. Likewise, Lindsay couldn't help but notice Rejeanne's WNBA tank top and Hard Rock Café boxers, as well as her well-toned biceps, the left one sporting a purple barbed-wire tattoo, and her shapely legs. *God, she's so hot.* Lindsay finally allowed the thought to escape her inner conscience before leaning on the dryer and uneasily crossing her legs.

Rejeanne seriously needed to break the sexually edgy silence. "So, what do you make of the 'Susanna-Lisa' relationship in 'Girl, Interrupted', Lin?"

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

"You should watch the bonus stuff on the DVD sometime. In an interview, Winona Ryder admitted that her character practically fell in love with Angelina's character," Rejeanne replied as she realized that she wasn't helping the tense situation one bit.

Thankfully, the dryer buzzer took both women out of their wine-enhanced, lust-filled reverie.

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Lindsay lay on Rejeanne's bed for several moments before admitting to herself that she was not going to sleep. Shyly, she padded over to the spare bedroom and lightly knocked on the door. "Yeah," the voice from inside whispered.

"I can't sleep, Jeannie," Lindsay announced.

There was a long moment of silence before the door finally opened and Rejeanne emerged. "I understand," she offered. "I'll come and keep you company for awhile. I have a hard time sleeping in strange beds too sometimes."

Rejeanne followed Lindsay back into her own bedroom and both women lay down on the extreme opposite ends of the bed.

*You could fit a football field between us,* Rejeanne thought as she cocked her head to the side and eyed her friend. "Shall I bore you to sleep with the more mundane tales of my college days?" she asked. "Perhaps you'd like to hear in mind-numbing detail about the summer that I spent driving a cab in Madison. Much easier to get a hack license there than in, say, Chicago. Or I could tell you about the night that I spent in the ER with this rugby buddy of mine who got part of her finger amputated in one of those automatic doors at Wal-Mart. The law suit is still pending..."

A thickly tense silence invaded the room for several seconds while Rejeanne pondered what her friend was thinking. Lindsay was staring at the ceiling, causing Rejeanne to turn her gaze to the ceiling as well. Finally Rejeanne felt a stir as Lindsay turned her body over on her side, facing Rejeanne.

“Jeannie,” she said, “I... I... may I kiss you?”

CONTINUED IN CHAPTER FIVE...