



# DESIGNING HER LIFE

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*For Peter, Elsie, Charlotte and Henrietta*

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Chapter One

Bright and early on Saturday morning, the telephone on Josie Saville's nightstand began to ring. She had stayed up later than usual the previous night, and had one more Cosmopolitan than she was used to. Both of these things contributed to her pain as she reached for the receiver. She put it to her ear, and tried to sound awake as she said, "Hello."

"Hello, my darling-dearest!" Garren Gruber's cheerful, and very loud, voice reverberated in her eardrum. She closed her eyes and flinched. "I hope I didn't wake you," he said.

"No, of course not," Josie said, snuggling back under her fluffy down comforter.

"Don't lie," Garren said, "it's perfectly obvious I woke you. What did you do last night? Did you stay up past your bedtime?"

"A little bit," she said, "plus, it seems my willpower wasn't all it should have been. There were a few cocktails I couldn't turn down."

"Well, you naughty girl," Garren said. "Do you think you could possibly wake yourself up enough to have breakfast with Aaron and me?"

"Oh, dear," Josie said, running her hand through her hair, "when were you thinking?" she asked.

"I was thinking in an hour. Meet me at Florent in the Meatpacking District; they make an excellent brunch. I'll even have a Bloody Mary waiting for you... the hair of the dog that bit you." Sensing her hesitation, he said, "Seriously, though, it's important."

Josie woke up a bit more, sensing his change of tone, and sat up in bed. "What's going on? Is everything okay?"

"Everything is fine. I just have something to tell you," he said.

"You're being very mysterious," she said, narrowing her eyes with suspicion.

"Just be there," Garren said, "and the mystery will be solved."

Josie pulled her down comforter off to the side, swung her long, tanned legs out of bed, put her feet on the floor and pushed herself up and off her king-size, four-poster carved dark pine bed. She snapped on the white ceramic lamp which sat on the matching pine night table, and walked across her rather spacious (for New York City, anyway) bedroom, decorated in shades of chocolate and cream, and into her lovely ivory marble and tile bathroom.

Flipping the light on, she examined herself in the mirror. Puffiness under her eyes reinforced the slightly hung-over feeling she had. She turned on the water, bent her head over the sink and splashed cool water onto her face. She patted her face dry and ran her fingers

through her long, straight nearly-black hair, and thought she probably needed a trim. But, all-in-all, she supposed she wasn't looking too bad for a girl of twenty-seven who worked about twelve hours out of every day, and continued her reading and studying long after she had returned home. Her pale green eyes sparkled despite the early hour, and the smattering of freckles across her nose made her appear even younger. She was trim and athletic, thanks to yoga and Pilates, but she could definitely use more sleep in her life. As usual, she wasn't giving herself enough credit. Most people meeting Josie for the first time were struck by her beauty and her grace.

She patted her face dry, threw the plush white towel into the wicker laundry basket, and walked out through her bedroom into the living room, decorated in a Shabby Chic-meets-Metropolitan style. Josie's traditional, comfy, down-cushioned sofas, upholstered in an ivory chenille were matched skillfully with pieces of modern furniture and accessories. The room was large, and not overfilled, leaving a sense of spaciousness which added to the Zen-like atmosphere of the room. It also served as Josie's home office, and it helped her to think.

She scuffed into her small kitchen and pulled a Diet Pepsi from the refrigerator. She opened it and took a long drink before closing the refrigerator and turning back around. She walked to her Régence honey-colored wood veneer desk and quickly thumbed through the many papers and periodicals that lay scattered there. An assortment of magazines: Art & Antiques, World of Interiors, Art in America, Surface, and Architectural Digest, and paperwork met her eyes. She was an interior designer by profession, and the journals kept her up-to-date. They were filled with dozens of slick advertisements, almost all of them for furniture or design firms she was acquainted with.

There weren't many design companies, people or products Josie wasn't acquainted with these days. Since graduating from Parsons School of Design six years earlier, she had been lucky enough to be associated with one of the largest and most-respected design firms in the country, Gruber & Associates. While she had never been completely in charge of a project as yet, she had benefited from the opportunity of working with some of the most talented architects, builders, interior designers, furniture designers and artists in the world. She usually stayed on the periphery of a project, working out the details once someone else had come up with the vision. But she was learning at the feet of the best, and she knew how valuable the experience and connections would be when she finally decided to go it on her own. Not now... but someday.

Her boss, the owner and creative director of the firm, was the fabulous, flamboyant and fussy Garren Gruber, and she adored him. This time next month, there would be an article in "Architectural Digest," featuring an apartment which they had designed together. She knew her picture wouldn't appear with the article – Garren's would – but it would still make her happy. She had worked very closely with the couple who owned the co-op apartment in an exclusive Park Avenue building, and had made many of the design choices herself, backed by Garren. She headed back for the shower, to get cleaned up and ready to find out what Garren's little mystery story was.

Josie walked into the restaurant exactly an hour later. The brisk September morning had put a tiny touch of pink on her cheeks and on the tip of her nose. She unraveled her black cashmere scarf from around her neck, as she looked around the room. She wore a thick cream-colored cashmere turtleneck, black trousers, and black driving moccasins. She had quickly thrown her hair back into a sleek ponytail, which was held with a simple black elastic. She was peeling off her black leather gloves as she spotted Garren and Aaron in the far corner.

The restaurant was relaxed and casual; a cross between a French bistro and a diner, if that is possible. The waiters and waitresses hustled around the room, serving their guests. Josie noticed a few people she knew, and nodded their way as she approached her table. She had woken up feeling anything but hungry, but the smells coming from the restaurant kitchen were enough to change her mind. She smelled fresh-baked breads, croissants, and pastry, and watched as a waiter brought a particularly luscious-looking omelet to a customer. Her appetite had definitely returned.

Garren rose as he saw Josie approaching the table. “Josephine, my darling-dearest.” He took her hand to draw her in closer, and kissed her on the cheek. He was striking and handsome with a healthy tan and nearly shoulder-length blond hair.

Aaron rose to get his kiss as well. Josie noticed he seemed worried, not quite himself. Aaron was a bit shorter than Garren, who was typically, Nordically tall. Aaron didn’t quite get to five foot nine, but he was still a couple of inches taller than Josie. His close-cropped brown hair was appropriately conservative and business-like, and suited his tortoiseshell glasses, and the rest of his grad-student look. He wore a long-sleeved black tee shirt and black jeans. The New York Times was in front of him on the table, and Josie would have bet real money the Wall Street Journal was in the shoulder bag he had thrown on the floor next to the table. Aaron was very handsome in a bookish kind of way, but this morning his good looks were marred by the serious look in his eye, and the furrow between his brows. He held Josie’s seat out for her, and squeezed her shoulders in a supportive way as she sat down.

Garren waved to the waiter as he said, “You’ve got your Bloody Mary there, but we need to order you something to eat. We’ve already ordered.”

Josie sipped her drink. “I’m grateful for this. You guys are making me nervous.”

The two men looked across the table guiltily at one another. Garren reached over and put his hand on Josie’s. “I don’t mean to upset you, dear, but I did want to tell you this in person, and I didn’t want you to find out from anybody else.” He paused to sip his mimosa, “Aaron and I have worked very hard to build up the business, and make it a success. We’ve put a great team together, and earned a respectable reputation.”

“Absolutely,” Josie said, “nobody could argue with that.”

“Well,” Garren went on, “Last night, I finalized a deal with Nils Archambault to sell the business. We’ve been discussing it for a while, but after the Milano hotel project came in, we were finally in a position to make a really good deal.” He looked at Josie, anxiously awaiting her

reaction. Josie swallowed as she thought of all of the possible implications of Garren's announcement. She didn't know where she stood because of this new development, but in that instant she had a very clear sense her life was about to change dramatically, and likely not for the better.

"I didn't know you were even considering it," she said, "you seem so happy."

"And I am happy. I've enjoyed it so much." He reached out and touched her hand, "not the least because of the people I've gotten to work with. But this is a fantastic deal, and now we can take some time off, and then pursue some other ventures."

The waiter interrupted briefly to take Josie's order. She was glad for the pause. She was momentarily stunned, but put her selfish worries aside for a moment, realizing what this meant for Garren. His business had just been acquired by one of the three biggest luxury goods conglomerates on the planet. The Archambault Group was the *crème-de-la-crème*, and owned some of the biggest wine producers, jewelers, couture and auction houses in the world. Josie knew this was an enormous coup for Garren. "So, have you two just become the richest people I know?" Josie said, smiling through her apprehension.

Garren smiled, too, obviously relieved that she appeared to be taking it so well. "Well," he said, laughing, "I guess that depends on how rich your friends are. But, suffice it to say, we're going to be shopping for a new, bigger house in Easthampton, a bigger apartment, probably with a view of the Park, new cars, a villa in Italy..."

Aaron leaned forward as Garren went on, "... a yacht..."

Aaron said, "Ignore him. We're not going to be that disgustingly acquisitive and materialistic."

"Speak for yourself," Garren said. "I, personally, intend to be unashamedly disgustingly acquisitive and materialistic."

Josie laughed. "I'm so happy for you guys," she said, "you really deserve this. You've both worked so hard to be successful... it's really about time you got to enjoy the finer things in life. And now you..." she gestured to Garren, "can afford to have a dozen houses in every style to experiment on." She forced a smile onto her face. "This is truly a great thing."

Garren looked at her gratefully. "Thank you so much, my dear Josephine," he said as he reached over to hug her. "Now," he said, sitting back, "I'm sure you're wondering how this is going to affect you."

"Well," she said, "I'm sure it's going to play out however it's supposed to, but... I did wonder ... have you sold the business outright? Are ... are you still going to be around consulting or anything?" Her words got stuck in her throat, and her eyes began to fill with tears.

"Oh, dear," Aaron said, looking over at Garren.

Garren's eyes got a bit misty, too, and he swallowed. "Well, I have to tell you, dear, I'm not going to be around very much. Certainly not at the office."

Josie sat back in her chair, and looked down at the hands she had clasped in her lap. That was exactly what she didn't want to hear. Her working life was the biggest part of her life, and she had been so satisfied in that department. Now she feared change. Garren was her mentor, as well as her friend, so she had to confess she felt a little abandoned by him. "How much is not much?" she said, inspecting her manicure because she couldn't look him in the eye.

"There's going to be a new creative director, because I've decided to step away," he said. "I could have stayed on with a salary, but I couldn't work with that kind of oversight at this stage in my life." He looked at her with a smile playing at the corners of his mouth, "I confess I'm going to take the money and run."

She still wasn't looking at him directly. He said, "Come on. Look at me." She finally raised her eyes to meet his gaze. "It's going to be okay!" He was hoping to get her to smile.

"Who is the new creative director?" she asked, trying to make her voice sound normal.

"You know him, actually," Garren said, as the waiter put his plate in front of him. "He's Sebastian Gálvez. He used to teach at Parsons. Did you ever have him?"

Josie didn't think it possible for her heart to sink any further, but at that news, it sank right down into her loafers. She certainly did have him. He had given her the only "F" grade she had ever gotten in her life. She remembered it very clearly. Josie was among the best students at Parsons, and had graduated in the top five. She routinely got A's, and was known for going the extra mile, and putting the extra polish to an assignment. Most of her teachers and fellow students liked her very much. So, it was a shock to her when she met Sebastian Gálvez. He was unashamedly a snob, and had found out where every one of his students had "come from." Even in his opening lecture, he had insisted that, although anyone could educate themselves, true good taste could not be taught. "It's in the genes, and in the breeding," he said, as he smiled at his favorites, the sons and daughters of NYC's social elite. For Josie, who did not fit into this category, it had been a terrible experience. They hadn't gotten along all semester, with Gálvez nitpicking everything she did. When they took their final exam, Gálvez had seized the opportunity to give Josie a failing grade. She had appealed the mark to the Academic Dean, and the grade was overturned. Gálvez had even been admonished. She was sure he would never forgive her for showing him up. How completely, impossibly horrible that he should be her new boss. "Oh, dear," she said, "I sure did have him, and he doesn't like me very much." That was an enormous understatement.

"Nonsense," Garren said, "who could ever dislike you? You're so perfectly perfect, and sweet in every way." He took a big forkful of his eggs, and smiled. "He's absolutely going to love you. And, believe me, nothing is going to change."

Josie stared down at her French toast with a total lack of the appetite that had been so strong just moments before. She knew Garren and Aaron would worry if she didn't eat anything,

but she had never felt less hungry in her life. She picked up her Bloody Mary and took a big, empowering drink. She began to bravely pick at her food as she listened to Garren and Aaron excitedly discussing their plans.

Back when Josie was just starting out, she was very lucky to have caught Garren's eye. She had studied very hard at school, learning the interior design trade at Parson's, while also taking courses in Engineering at NYU. But the world of interior design, especially in New York City, was very definitely closed to outsiders. You either had to know someone, or be related to someone. Many designers hired their rich, society assistants based on their ability to bring in business and clients. Josie had lost both of her parents in an automobile crash when she was still in junior high, and had no such contacts.

It was still painful for Josie to think about her parents. The intervening thirteen years since their untimely deaths had done nothing to make her loss any easier. Josie's father had been a handsome, kind tower of a man, standing nearly six feet four inches tall. Josie wistfully remembered him coming home from his law office, and meeting him outside on the front lawn. He was so strong that at thirteen, he was still able to pick Josie up, and hold her over his head as he swung her around.

Josie's mother had been a beauty, and had the tiaras and trophies to prove it. She had been Miss New York State in 1971, and had used the scholarship money she had won to acquire a Bachelor's degree in Art History. She had donated her services to the inner-city school system, teaching underprivileged youngsters about the beauty of Chagall and Leonardo DaVinci, and the importance of creative self-expression. It was from her that Josie had received her dedication to volunteering and the concept of giving back. Their loss was a terrible blow, but she continued to admire the people they were, and attempted to live up to the example they had set.

Following their deaths, Josie had lived with an elderly great-aunt in a leafy, quiet suburb of Buffalo, New York, for several years until her death as well. She had struck out on her own for New York City when she was only seventeen. Once she had worked her way through Parson's, graduated at the top of her class, and realized how the system worked, she had despaired of getting a decent job. She had all the talent in the world, but no connections. Garren Gruber could have hired any one of a number of thin, designer-clad debutantes, who would have brought their daddy's business with them. He had seen something in Josie. Garren had given her a chance, and for that she would be eternally grateful.

As Josie continued to listen to Garren and Aaron merrily discussing their plans, her mind continued to wander. Just one week earlier, things had been so different...

Josie's Manolo Blahnik heels made click-click noises as she jogged up the stairs to her office. She loved coming to work every day. They had the most beautiful office. Situated in the heart of Soho on Mercer Street, their building was a stunning piece of Early Modern architecture,

nestled in the midst of other fashion and design enterprises, and just a brisk walk from the craziness of Canal Street.

She reached the double oak doors with “Gruber & Associates” in a gold, bold AvantGarde font, and pulled the ornate gold door handle on the right to reveal the luxurious but comfortable, and always drop-dead chic, décor. The furniture and paintings and accessories changed frequently. Garren said he would never, never be finished with either his home, or his office. The flavor of this month was a natural palette with mocha brown quilted suede sofas (a la Coco Chanel), creamy Aubusson carpets with hints of lime and cranberry, accents of leopard skin and Mars red in the cushions and throws, and West African masks and tribal statuary. No matter what Garren chose, though, he invariably chose well. Everything blended seamlessly.

Josie stopped and dropped her Dolce & Gabbana black leather tote bag at the receptionist’s desk and said “Good Morning” to Bianca as she picked up her messages and sifted through them. Bianca, their receptionist, had blond shoulder-length hair which today was a brilliant royal blue from the ear down to the ends (this also changed frequently, not always in harmony with the décor, although Garren would have loved that). Today the hair was up in a ponytail, and the fingernails matched the royal blue of the hair, Josie noticed. Even if she was fashion rebel, Bianca had her look together.

Josie took her messages and her tote bag, and headed back toward her cubicle. The office operated on an “open” plan, and even Garren’s office had clear glass walls. Everyone could see what everyone else was doing, because Garren was convinced it would bring out the “friendly competition” he believed got the creative juices flowing. All Josie knew was she wished, every now and again, that she could have a private conversation. It was alright, though... Garren probably did have a point. When she looked around the office at everyone working their telephones, or bent in concentration over their worktables, she never felt like goofing off.

She probably wouldn’t have felt like it anyway, she thought, as she tossed her tote bag onto the floor next to her desk. She was just too darn busy. The desk itself was small, because she did most of her work at the worktable which stood next to it. The worktable was nearly six feet long and four feet wide, and had a few sketches and some pencils and templates strewn across it. She had just finished up a large project with Garren, and was working out the details on some smaller projects she was supervising for other, less-experienced, members of the firm. She glanced the drawings over quickly.

Josie scooped up the drawings and blueprints from their recently completed project, and placed them in a large file box. They would be further organized by the office intern, and placed carefully into the firm archive. Garren was meticulous about such things. When she had put the box outside of her cubicle to be picked up by the office runner, she turned her attention to the work she was supervising. Most of the firm’s novice designers had real talent and enormous potential. She set aside the work of one very new, very green, recruit, and made a note to have a talk with her, and supervise her more closely. Her work wasn’t even close to what their client was looking for. Josie was going to have to remind the young lady she wasn’t decorating her own apartment, she was decorating someone else’s, and it had to be done to their taste, not hers.

She hadn't yet had an opportunity to sit down, when she heard a high-pitched cry over her left shoulder. She jumped, but wasn't concerned, since Garren often expressed himself that way. She turned now to see him standing in the doorway to his office, arms over his head, fingers outspread. His blue eyes sparkled on his deeply-tanned face. He didn't have to fake that tan, either. He traveled extensively, and during these summer months, he spent almost every weekend at his house in Easthampton. His hair was gorgeously and perfectly highlighted, partially by the sun, Josie figured, but mostly by the expensive colorist he went to see every three weeks. He also kept himself fit and trim with the help of a personal trainer. He took his appearance very, very seriously. "Image is everything in the design business," he would often tell her, usually when he saw a mark on her clothing, or detected split-ends. He didn't hesitate to point these things out, either. But, to his credit, he had the ability to make such comments seem caring and fatherly.

"Hey!" he shouted. "Everybody into my office immediately! There are some mimosas that require your attention. We're celebrating! I expect everyone to indulge, and I expect everyone's work not to suffer! I have wonderful news!" Garren spun around, back into his office, and began popping champagne corks merrily, one after the other, as the staff drifted slowly into his large office. Garren was larger-than-life in many ways. He slept little, worked constantly, and seemed to crackle with energy. His spontaneity and good cheer always rubbed off on those around him. He had one large table completely covered with bottles of Cristal, jugs of orange juice, pastry, croissants and bowls of strawberries.

Josie stepped around the corner and into the office. Garren caught her eye immediately and came her way. "Josie-Wosie," he sang, as he handed her a mimosa, "we are happy campers today, darling-dearest. And may I say you look fabulous?" He held her hand as he stepped back and examined her, "I'm thinking the pencil skirt is from Prada... and I'm loving the way the dark gray compliments the cream in your cardigan. It's a bit school marm, but you're making it work." He brought her close and kissed her on the cheek before turning around and heading for his desk. He pushed his blueprints aside, leaned back in his plush, black leather chair, swung his long legs up and plunked his crossed ankles on his desk.

"And just why is the camping so happy?" Josie asked, seating herself on the edge of the desk.

"Darling, not only are we going to be highlighted in Architectural Digest next month, complete with a devastatingly handsome photograph of me, but we have also just landed the Milano hotel rooms, common areas, and lobby!"

"Wow!" Josie said, smiling, "the whole thing?" She reached out and slapped his ankle, "you got the whole thing? That's amazing!"

"I know," Garren said, running his fingers through his hair, and looking up at the ceiling, "I just can't wait to get started. I've got it almost completely worked out in my head. I know the spirit of what we're going for. I'm thinking casual chic, a sort of relaxed royalty kind of thing. It must have the feel of luxury in an Italian villa. It will be called the Milano, after all"

“For the suites... high-quality antiques mixed up with slipcovered down sofas... that kind of thing? For the other rooms... Louis XV reproduction chairs thrown together with lots of down-filled cushions, sisal rugs, and drapes with bullion fringe?” Josie asked with a smile.

Garren grinned, put his hands behind his head, and said, “Ah, my dear, you read my mind, and that’s exactly why you’re going to assist me.”

“Yea!” Josie squealed, and rapped her heels on his desk.

“Easy on the furniture, dear,” he said. “By the way, what are you up to this evening? Aaron and I would like to take you out to dinner. You’re getting too skinny.” Garren Gruber’s partner, Aaron, was his silent partner at the office. He provided business advice and investment capital, but was anything but silent in their private life. They had been together for years. Aaron, too, liked to mother Josie.

Aaron was the business genius of the two of them. He awoke each morning at 5:00 a.m., after sleeping about four hours, and read five newspapers, some trade journals and financial publications. Then he sequestered himself in their home office for the remainder of the day, checking their financial portfolio and trading as necessary. He reviewed the firm’s finances, only allowing himself a half-hour break for lunch. It was this uncanny talent he had with figures that had helped Garren to be the success he was. Aaron gave Garren free rein creatively in the office, and seldom even showed up there. But he kept a firm hand on the financial reins, and he curbed the worst of Garren’s excesses.

When they had first met, Garren had been a clubbing, hard-partying hedonist, and Aaron’s influence had probably saved his life. Now they lived like an old married couple, eating out at the most glamorous restaurants, and attending the most exclusive parties, but never drinking to excess, and always making time for exercise and proper nutrition. They knew Josie was an orphan, so they showered her with extra attention and well-intentioned interference.

“I’d love to!” she said, quietly, not wanting to increase office jealousy by showing off their special friendship.

Everyone from the firm was helping themselves to the goodies, and relaxing and laughing. Josie looked around the room and smiled, thinking of how lucky she was. She was able to do the job she loved, and work with creative people who inspired her. New York City was one of the toughest, most merciless places in the world to try to make it. Josie was earning good money, and was well on her way. She knew there were many girls who would have loved to be in her shoes, and she made sure she was grateful. Every day, she reminded herself to count her blessings.

As she stared at her untouched breakfast, Josie looked back on that day, just last week, with nostalgia. So much was about to change.

## Chapter Two

That evening, Josie got dressed, and examined herself in the ebony-stained, full-length mirror with antiqued glass she had designed and built herself. Josie could never curb her creativity, and she loved to design her own furniture, and then build it with her own hands. She had hoped one day to design her own line of furniture. She thought back to the everyday complaints she had just the day before, and now they seemed so silly.

She couldn't wait to hash it all out with her best friends, all of whom she had met at Parsons, and all of whom also new Sebastian Gálvez, and the skunk he was. She looked herself over critically, and was pleased with her ensemble, even if there was no man at the moment to dress for. She dressed for herself, mostly, anyway, and proudly stroked the lovely sixteen-inch strand of eight millimeter South Sea pearls she had purchased with her first bonus from Garren. Their lustrous glow reflected from her tanned neck and chest, and cast a very subtle sheen onto her skin. They reminded her she could take care of herself. She wore diamond stud earrings of ½-carat each, and a silver Cartier tank watch. She knew quality, and when she saved up for a purchase, she bought only those things that would stand the test of time.

Compared with her friends, Josie was fairly conservative when it came to fashion. They were all young and fit and cute, and they dressed to show it off, but never crossing over that fine line into trashy. She always wore good clothing that fit properly, but she didn't go for low-slung hipster pants, or tiny bare-midriff tops. Tonight, for instance, she wore a black Michael Kors cocktail dress that fell to the knee, and had tiny spaghetti straps. Over this she had thrown a silvery V-necked cardigan by Louis Vuitton and her new favorite Manolo Blahnik slingbacks with the pointy, closed toe. She grabbed her Gucci purse with the old-fashioned monogram print, double-snakes-head cloisonné clasp and the gold, bamboo-link chain, and thought she looked pretty cute as she closed her apartment door behind her.

Josie walked through the door of Chez Claude, and looked around at the hustling, bustling, beautiful crowd. The waiters and waitresses rushed about the room, every bit as good-looking as the glamorous patrons they served. Josie looked for her friends, and saw Corinna at the bar, chatting with a balding man in a slick navy blue suit, crisp white shirt and a red tie. "A lawyer or stockbroker," Josie thought. He was lucky to be chatting with Corinna, who was gorgeous – professionally gorgeous, actually. Corinna was a very nearly famous, and very busy, model. Getting her and the rest of Josie's friends into the same city, let alone the same room, was nearly impossible. Corinna looked amazing, as usual. She was a very light-skinned African American woman (her father was white, and her mother was Jamaican). She was 5'10" tall, and still wore 4" heels most of the time. Tonight, she wore a cream-colored Helmut Lang knee-length cocktail dress, with some very strategic and provocative cutouts. The cream color was the perfect accent for her coffee-and-cream complexion. Even with only the barest hints of makeup, she looked stunning.

Josie walked over and tapped Corinna on the shoulder. Corinna squealed, "Hey!" and reached out to wrap her arms around Josie's neck. When Corinna finally released her, Josie found herself bathed in the glow of Corinna's glorious smile.

“How are you so gorgeous, and how is your smile so bright, when you must be severely jet-lagged?” Josie asked.

“Practice, dear, practice,” Corinna said, “at twenty-five, I’m not as young as most of these little embryos they’ve got walking the catwalk now, but I must counter their youth with my professionalism and experience,” she said. Corinna turned to her companion, “George, I’d like you to meet my friend, Josie.”

George reached out his hand to shake Josie’s, but she noticed the little line between his eyebrows which showed his displeasure at having to share Corinna. “George is here with some friends,” Corinna said, “and he was just keeping me company until you got here.” She turned to him and said, “Thank you so much. It was great meeting you.” She gave him a dazzling smile, but George knew he was being dismissed. George wandered off, and Corinna turned her smile on Josie.

“Poor guy,” Josie said, “I think you broke his heart.”

“Oooo...” Corinna said, pouting, “I hope not. He seemed nice.”

“You’re too much, my dear – beautiful and kind,” Josie said.

“Oh, shut up,” Corinna said, and turned around to collect their drinks from the bar. “I ordered Cosmopolitans for all of us. You could probably use one.” Corinna remembered Gálvez very well.

At the same time, Josie felt someone come up behind her and put soft, small, fragranced hands over her eyes. “Oh dear,” she said, “what now?” She turned around to see the smiling face of Lucienne. Josie reached up and hugged her, running her hands lightly over Lucienne’s soft, curly, light-brown hair. Luci usually wore her hair up off her neck in a twist, more befitting her role as a literary agent, but tonight it was down and free. She referred to her everyday look as “sexy librarian” – lots of well-cut tweed jackets, pencil skirts and pumps, with her reading glasses hanging around her neck on a chain. Tonight, she wore a light and breezy grey and pale blue slip dress on her skinny frame.

“Great bag,” Josie said, looking over the latest, nobody-can-get-it Louis Vuitton “pochet” purse Lucienne dangled from her wrist, “usually Corinna is the first one with the ‘it’ bag of the season.”

“Yes I am!” Corinna squeaked, “you skunk!” Corinna reached out and touched the bag, admiring it.

“One of my writers is tight with Marc Jacobs, and got me one as a favor,” she said, playfully swinging it, knowing they were both green with envy.

“Well, it’s great, and you’re sooooo... lucky,” Corinna said, “where’s Bonnie, I wonder?” Bonnie was the fourth and final member of their dinner party that evening.

“I think she’s probably going to be late. I mean, she usually is,” Luci said, with a little bit of irritation.

“Come on,” Josie said, “you know she’s just got a different sense of time than the rest of the world.” She handed Luci her cocktail. “Why don’t we just get our table, and she can join us when she gets here?”

“You’re right,” Luci said, “I shouldn’t be so negative.”

Josie talked to the hostess, and they all picked up their drinks and went to sit down.

“I can’t eat too much tonight,” Corinna said, as she looked at the menu, “I have a bikini shoot in the morning, so I can’t have a poochy belly.”

“So you starve yourself?” Josie asked.

“No, I just know I can have a little meal tonight, but definitely no breakfast. My big meal tomorrow will be a large, late lunch.”

“I don’t know how you can go without breakfast,” Luci said, “I’d faint.”

“You get used to it,” Corinna said. “They’re paying you to look your best, after all. I try to look at it the same way as if I were a professional athlete. There’s some hard work and pain required, and some sacrifices need to be made. You should see some of these fifteen-year-olds. They can eat an entire large pizza, and still do a bikini shoot the next day. They’ve got the metabolism of bunny rabbits, God bless them.”

“I’m here!” Bonnie said, as she jogged up to the table. “I’m so sorry I’m late! I got to chatting with the cab driver and made him take a wrong turn.”

Josie smiled indulgently at Bonnie as she sat down and began to smooth her ruffled feathers. Bonnie was so adorably flighty and high-strung at the same time. Her long, straight blond hair fell well past her shoulders. Tonight she wore a menswear tight white tank top with a short denim skirt. She wore amber beads around her neck, a pair of large, gold hoop earrings, and carried a Chanel tote bag. Bonnie worked for Bazaar magazine, as the editorial assistant to the Fashion Director, and seemed to be constantly out-of-breath and rushed. They all knew she worked for a very demanding and difficult woman, so that accounted for a certain amount of tension, but she had been flighty ever since they knew her at Parsons, and Josie didn’t think Bonnie would mellow anytime soon.

Josie looked around the table at her friends, and was filled with pride. She didn’t have any family, so her friendships were particularly important to her. And these women were incredible. Josie and Bonnie were the only ones to have actually completed their studies at Parsons. Corinna had left after the first semester, when she discovered the enormous amount of money she could be making if she modeled full-time. Luci had discovered her creative instincts were better spent with the written word, and had left Parsons for NYU after their first year.

It was amazing they had stayed so very close for so very long, considering how busy their lives had become.

“Alright,” Josie said as she picked up her menu, “who goes first with the update? I, personally, want to hear all about Fashion Week from Corinna.”

“Oh, me too!” Bonnie said, “I’d love to hear your perspective on the madness backstage this season. I promise not to quote you directly. I’ll keep it on deep background,” she said with a wink.

Corinna wasn’t listening, however. She was looking over Bonnie’s shoulder. “Um, actually, I wanted to find out all about Josie’s new boss, the dreaded Sebastian Gálvez, but now I’d like to get her perspective on the fact that Josh just walked in with his new girlfriend.” She looked with concern over at Josie, trying to gauge how she was going to handle seeing the man she had dated for a year-and-a-half, and who had broken up with her only two months ago, on a date with another woman.

“You’re kidding,” Josie said, but kept herself from looking over in that direction. “Oh, gosh, I’m going to need a big, deep breath. Did he see that I’m here? He’s not coming over here, is he? What’s the girl look like? Is she cute?”

“Stop it immediately,” Luci said, and reached over to hold Josie’s hand. “Self-doubt doesn’t agree with you, and you know it. I refuse to allow you to get visibly upset over this. You can’t give him the satisfaction.”

“Seriously,” Bonnie said in agreement.

“Oh, I know,” Josie said, sitting back in her chair, and tucking her sleek, dark hair behind her ears. “I’m actually in a very good stage of grief over the whole relationship. Give me two more weeks, and I promise you I’ll be over it.” She saw them all looking at her with concern. “And you can stop looking at me with pity, too.”

“Sorry, dear,” Luci said, putting her hand over Josie’s, “we certainly don’t pity you. You’re a great person, and I know something like this won’t get you down for long. Besides, you’re gorgeous, and you know you can have any man you want.”

Josie laughed. “It’s okay, really,” she said, “I mean, it’s sad he turned out to be kind of a jerk, but it’s not like I didn’t see the signs.” She glanced over to look at him briefly, as if to prove to herself it was no big deal. “He never respected my work, and never supported me in it. He just made fun of it. Plus, he was never as serious about relationships in general. I was hoping I would marry him, for crying out loud, and I think he just wanted to continue dating forever. Maybe he’ll find the right girl to settle down with, but I know one thing for sure... it’s not me.” She reached out, and took a sip from her cocktail. “At this point, I’m just angry with myself that I wasted an entire year-and-a-half on the guy. I’d love to have it back.”

“Well, if you can get time to run in reverse, please let me know how you did it,” Corinna laughed, “It would be invaluable in my career.” She was trying to lighten the mood. “Besides, don’t you meet tons of rich guys at that firm of yours? You charge enough.”

Josie laughed, and said, “Believe me, the only men who can afford my work are old enough to be my father. Plus, at least 90% of them are very, very married. They would pay anything so their wives will have something to do.”

The people whom Josie dealt with were usually remarkably alike, even though their stated goals for their refurbished environment were: “I want it to be unique. I want it to express my personality.” When Garren or Josie would propose something unusual, or something very much out-of-the-mainstream, the response was a horrified, “Well, let’s not go overboard.” Garren always chuckled at these moments, and took them in stride, while Josie bristled with frustration. “My dear,” he would say, “we’ve done our job. It reflects her personality perfectly. She’s a rich, boring, bored, stay-at-home wife to whom it is more important other people like her home, than it is that she like it herself.” Josie realized it was largely true. The lifestyle magazines would close down if it weren’t true. But, every now and again, a truly individual quirky character came along, and Josie lived for those customers.

But as far as an avenue for dating, interior design definitely was not it. She explained all of this to the girls, and emphasized, “I deal almost exclusively with the women – usually crazy women.”

“Such a bummer,” Bonnie said, “There aren’t even any cute sons you could rob the cradle with?” They all laughed until Corinna noticed Josh heading for their table.

“Here he comes,” she said quietly.

Josh was extremely handsome and polished. His full head of dark, curly hair perfectly set off his tan and his gleaming white teeth. He was tall, and dressed casually, but impeccably, in a black V-neck sweater over a crisp, white tee shirt, and soft, nicely-cut khaki pants. “Hello, ladies,” he said, “you’re all looking amazing, as usual. It’s a shame ‘Sex and the City’ went off the air. You gals totally fit the profile.” He smiled his most charming smile, and Josie was able to remember one of the most comforting things about their breakup. Josh was extremely boring. He was a very successful entrepreneur, creating and running a software development company which catered to the design and architecture crowd. That’s how they had met. The firm had purchased one of his products, and he had come personally to train them all on it. One would think his close contact and interaction with so many designers would have made some kind of favorable impression upon him. However, he talked to them all like children while he trained them, rolling his eyes as what he perceived to be foolish questions, and becoming downright rude whenever someone interrupted him with an inquiry during one of his lectures.

Garren had warned her he didn’t like Josh, and didn’t like the way he treated Josie. But she wouldn’t listen to anyone. She was impressed by his good looks, his knowledge, and his business success. She should have known by now those qualities are nice, but they are by no

means at the top of the list when choosing a mate. She knew, now. Or, at least she hoped she did.

Josh looked over at Josie, “How’s it going? Good to see you.”

“Great,” Josie said, smiling and remaining in perfect control. “How’s it going with you?”

“Well, I could be better, of course,” he said, “work is crazy, and I never seem to get a minute to myself.”

“Oh, that’s too bad,” Josie said, willing him to go away.

“It’s better than being bored, I suppose,” he said, chuckling.

“I suppose,” Josie said, waiting for him to get the hint. When he didn’t, she said, “Well, you probably want to get back to your friends. It was good to see you.”

“Bye!” all three of the other girls said, nearly in unison.

He got the hint then. His smile faded a bit as he said, “Yeah; good to see you, too. Bye, guys.” He waved as he turned and headed back toward his table.

The girls politely waited until he was out of earshot before giggling. “That was brilliant,” Luci said, patting Josie on the back.

“Magnificent,” Corinna agreed, “I’m bursting with pride.”

Bonnie smiled her encouragement.

“It really wasn’t that bad,” Josie said, smiling, “Onward and upward,” she said, lifting her glass.

“Onward and upward,” repeated the girls, laughing and clicking their glasses together in the center of the table.

The next few weeks seemed to fly by in a blur of activity, and a haze of apprehension for Josie. She tried to treasure this last bit of time working with Garren, but she couldn’t help the dread with which she viewed the future. She had also spent time with Sebastian Gálvez, unfortunately. He had come in on several days to get the lay of the land, and meet everyone. Oh, there was no doubt he remembered her, either. The first time they were introduced by Garren, his eyes had gone wide with recognition, and then narrowed with dislike.

Sebastian was tall and imposing, and very fit. He was built more like a quarterback than an interior designer. His perfectly combed black hair was shiny and healthy, and his dark brown eyes stared out from under long lashes and heavy lids. He wore only the very best, tailored suits,

and always looked perfect. Josie had seen women go crazy for him with his deep voice and Chilean accent, but she thought he looked like an expensive gigolo.

Sebastian was being sickeningly charming to Josie while Garren was around, but she had a feeling that would change when Garren was gone. There were fleeting moments when she caught him looking at her out of the corner of his eye, and she saw the distaste. He didn't like her. Several times, he had taken some of her sketches and looked them over. He was doing it with everyone, but he would normally share a friendly suggestion, or a bit of encouragement. With Josie, he just glanced her things over, dropped them back on her table, and said, "hmm," without so much as a look in her direction.

The night of Garren's farewell party had been particularly difficult. The entire company had met at the Rainbow Room for a party-to-end-all-parties blowout. Everyone was roaring drunk, dancing and wishing Garren well. In fact, as a precaution, he had ordered taxis for every single staff member, and car keys were forfeited at the door. There were at least two sober people, however -- Sebastian and Josie. Sebastian was retaining his dignity because he was the new boss. Josie, however, sipped the same glass of Pinot Noir all night, pretending to be cheerful and happy for Garren, but secretly wishing it was all a bad dream.

The day she dreaded finally arrived, however. Garren was gone, somewhere on Pantellaria Island, off the coast of Sicily, for three months, and she had to face going to her office without him. She was sure Sebastian had held his tongue in Garren's presence, but now there was nothing to shield her.

She took great care in getting dressed that chilly October morning. She chose a white sleeveless top, a long slim-fitting black skirt, a pair of conservative black pumps, and her favorite grey and white tweed Chanel jacket. She wanted to feel very confident, and she also didn't want to take any chances. Part of her thought if she felt good, and looked good, that Sebastian wouldn't fire her on the spot.

She arrived at the office a full forty-five minutes early, walking straight to her desk. She observed Sebastian in what was now his office. He hadn't wasted any time moving in. He must have had it all done during the weekend, wiping away all traces of Garren, and establishing himself firmly as the new man in charge. She missed the soft, traditional touches Garren had used to decorate his office. Sebastian's preference was a more linear style, stark and modern. It was inarguably tasteful but it left her a bit cold. It suited him.

She started glancing over the sketches and swatches she had strewn across her worktable. During the past few weeks, she had been working almost exclusively on the designs for the Milano hotel. She and Garren and Sebastian had been working together to ensure the project went smoothly during the transition. There were twenty-five guest rooms, which included seven suites, ten grand queen rooms, and eight deluxe rooms. Sebastian was working on the lobby and common rooms himself, since these public rooms would receive the most attention and defined the hotel's ambience. He was also working on the suites himself, leaving Josie in charge of the smaller, less ornate rooms. Even though they didn't carry as much prestige, these rooms required the most work, as there were eighteen of them, and they had the strictest budget. Josie

sat down at her desk and pulled a folder out of her tote bag. She threw these new sketches and papers onto her worktable. This was all of the work she had done the previous night. The architects were nearly finished with their work on the hotel. In a week or so, she would go in with the carpenters and the painters and start work.

“Miss Saville,” Sebastian said over her shoulder. Josie jumped. She hadn’t heard him approaching. “Can I please see you in my office?”

“Yes, Mr. Gálvez,” she said. They were definitely not on a first-name basis.

She followed him back, and watched as he picked up a piece of paper from his desk. He handed it to her. “Can you explain this?” he said.

Josie took the paper, and saw it was an invoice from Henredon Furniture Industries for the occasional tables she had ordered for the hotel rooms. “These are the tables I ordered. We discussed this before.” She looked confused.

Sebastian looked angry. “I am aware that we discussed ordering the tables, but I don’t think we discussed ordering eighty of them!” He stabbed his finger at the invoice. “Eighty of those tables were just delivered to our warehouse, for, as you can see here, a total of \$37,200!”

“Oh no,” Josie said, putting her hand up to her mouth, “I meant to order eight tables, not eighty. I mean, I’m sure I only ordered eight tables. Nothing like this has ever happened before, honestly. And they’ve been delivered already? Oh, my goodness.” She looked at Sebastian, “I don’t know how this could have happened.”

“Carelessness,” Sebastian barked, snatching the invoice out of her hand, “That’s how things like this happen.”

Josie’s cheeks started to burn. “I’m sure I can get it straightened out.”

“Well, somebody had better get it straightened out, because this firm is not going to absorb the cost for this enormous mistake,” his accent became much more pronounced when he was angry, Josie noticed. “I want you to first talk to our attorney, to see how exposed we are... to see what our rights are.” He rifled through the business card index on his desk, and grabbed a card, thrusting it at Josie.

She took it, but said, “I don’t think it’s necessary to talk to a lawyer. I’m sure I can just call my contact at Henredon and explain the error.”

“Well, let’s just assume that won’t be good enough,” he said. “I myself don’t want to have to pay a lawyer \$300 an hour, in addition to what I’m already paying, to get this straightened out.” People were starting to arrive at the office, and Josie was very aware of the fact that they could hear every word. “But you’ll forgive me if I just don’t trust you to ‘straighten this out’ yourself.”

Josie opened her mouth to say something else, but Sebastian sat down and said, “You can go now.” He stared at her with so much anger in his dark eyes that it silenced her. She turned and left.

As she approached her workstation, she would have done anything for walls and a door. She wanted to put her head down on her desk and cry. She looked down at the card in her hand, seeing that she would be humiliating herself in front of Paul D. Markham, Esq. of Wheaton, Crawford & Merryman.

“I can’t believe this is happening,” she said to herself as she picked up the telephone and began to dial.

“Paul Markham,” a cheerful voice answered, once Josie had been routed through the receptionist.

“How do you do? I’m terribly sorry to bother you. My name is Josephine Saville, and I work at Garren Gruber & Associates. Sebastian Gálvez suggested I call regarding a little problem I have.” She held her forehead in one hand, and the receiver in the other. She was mortified.

“Sure. What can I do to help?”

“Wow,” Josie thought, “I really like that voice.” It had a low, base, masculine timbre, but definitely pleasant.

“Well, I made an order through one of our suppliers, and I made a mistake on the order form, and, um, it seems I ordered eighty side tables instead of eight.” She waited to hear him laugh on the other end, but he didn’t.

“Have they been delivered yet?”

“Yes, unfortunately,” Josie said.

“Well ... have you called your supplier to explain what happened?”

“I was going to do that, but Mr. Gálvez wanted me to call you first.”

“Why don’t you go ahead and do that? Call them, and explain what happened. As long as they didn’t do anything custom-made, and as long as they’re one of your regular suppliers, I’m sure they’ll take them back. You’ll probably have to pay for the return shipping, but that’s it.”

“Thanks,” Josie said, “I’ll do that right now.”

“Okay. Why don’t you give me a call back after you’ve spoken to them?”

“I will.” She put down the telephone, relieved. “That wasn’t so bad,” she thought.

She called her contact, Martin, at Henredon, and spent the next few moments enduring his laughter. “Eighty, instead of eight? You dope!” he said.

“Oh, thank you for being so understanding,” she said sarcastically, “I don’t feel quite stupid enough yet.”

“Well, don’t worry about it. We have a big drop-off about two miles from your warehouse next week. I’ll have the guys bring the empty truck back to you, and have the other seventy-two picked up then. That way it will only cost you the labor and the return ride, okay?”

Josie thanked him profusely, put down the telephone, and headed for Sebastian’s office, relieved it was all worked out. “Mr. Gálvez?” she said, standing at the door. He refused to even acknowledge her presence, and kept working. “Mr. Gálvez, I’ve got that all straightened out. They’re taking the tables back, and we’re only being charged for labor and a one-way trip.”

“Only...,” he said, mocking her tone, “well, that may not seem like much to you, but when it’s added to your salary, it’s a steep price for doing business,” he said, still not looking up.

Josie felt slapped. Her face became very flushed again, and she moved away quickly, before he could see how badly he’d hurt her.

She swallowed hard as she walked back to her desk. “What in the world is happening?” she whispered to herself as she sat down. She had never made a mistake like that before, and how was it possible it happened in her first week with Sebastian? Garren would have laughed it off, and helped her to fix it. She took a deep breath and went back to the work on her desk. Her sketches were all laid out in front of her. Then she saw the lawyer’s card again. Although she hated the thought of it, she did say she’d call back.

When he answered, she said, quickly, “I just wanted to let you know everything turned out fine. It was just as you said, they’ll charge us for the return shipping, but that’s all.”

“Terrific,” Paul said, chuckling, “you be careful with those zeros from now on, okay?”

Josie’s cheeks started to burn again. She certainly didn’t have to take it from him, too. “Look, I’m very aware a mistake was made, and it’s been fixed, so I don’t think sarcasm is the kind of legal advice I was looking for.”

“Whoa, I’m sorry,” he said, “I was just kidding. I didn’t mean...”

Josie cut him off. “Thank you very much for your help.” She hung up the telephone without saying goodbye. She immediately regretted it. She wasn’t in the habit of behaving so rudely.

Josie felt terrible. That poor guy ... she knew he hadn't meant any harm. She picked up the telephone, swallowed her pride, and dialed him again. She got his voicemail this time, and was grateful. She left a message that was appropriately apologetic, and felt a little better. Only a little better, though. She still had to face the fact that she was screwing up at her job, and her boss hated her.

The rest of Josie's day drifted by in a haze of self-pity. She double-checked and reviewed everything she touched and second-guessed all of her design schemes. Her self-doubt was so severe, she couldn't even look at the sketches that had pleased her so much only the night before.

She called Luci and made plans to meet for a cocktail at the end of the business day. She needed some serious cheering up.

Josie got to the restaurant before Luci, and ordered herself a bottle of Pinot Noir. She was sure Luci would want to share, and, if not, Josie was confident she could take care of it herself. She thumbed through a copy of the New York Times, and came to the business announcement she knew would be there. There was Sebastian's name in black and white, proclaiming him their new creative director. Josie took a big, long swallow of her wine as she looked at it, and read the accompanying flattering description of Sebastian's qualifications. The paper went on and on, listing Sebastian's credentials, which Josie already knew well enough. He was very well-educated, and very smart. She couldn't take that away from him. Of course, nowhere did it mention he was a stone-cold heartless jerk. It would have been just as accurate as the rest of the announcement, but unfortunately they hadn't asked Josie for her input.

Her eyes drifted down the page, and there, near the bottom, oh goodness, was a picture of none other than Paul D. Markham, Esq., and he was gorgeous. The photo was a strictly professional black and white photo, probably taken when Paul had joined the firm. He was dressed in a suit, white shirt and dark tie, but his smile was generous and warm. It was obviously impossible to imagine how tall he was, but he had thick dark hair, an olive complexion, big dark eyes, high cheekbones, and a long, straight nose. Ordinarily, Josie would say he was her ideal. The announcement described his making partner at Wheaton, Crawford & Merryman. Josie read the announcement and wondered if she could possibly have worse luck or judgment. Paul Markham also had some impressive credentials. He had attended Harvard, and then Harvard Law School, with just enough time to get a Master's degree in Engineering at MIT in between. "I'm so embarrassed," Josie thought again, reminding herself of her horrible manners this afternoon, "he was nothing but kind and helpful, and then he makes one little joke, and I fly off the handle." Once again, she felt the fresh sting of shame.

Luci slid into the stool next to Josie with a cheerful "Hi!"

Josie tried to smile bravely in greeting.

"Yikes," Luci said, "what's up with you?"

“Well, for starters,” Josie said, sliding over the paper, “this is a picture of the handsome biscuit I totally insulted on the telephone today, after he tried to help me.”

“Oooo... yummy,” Luci said, looking at the photo, “how could you be mean to such a tasty morsel?”

“In my defense,” Josie said, sipping her wine, “I’m a total idiot.” She explained her horrible day, beginning with Sebastian and ending with Paul.

“Wow,” Luci said, “harsh eight hours.” She looked at Josie with concern.

Josie’s eyes filled with tears for a moment, “if it were just a harsh day, that would be one thing. I’m actually concerned that things are irreparable. I mean...” she wiped her tears away, “I miss Garren so much, and this new guy just hates me – hates me from way back. I don’t know how I’m going to be able to do my job in this kind of atmosphere. I’m supposed to be creative, and I’m totally stifled. I’m double-checking everything I do, because I don’t trust myself. I’m not sleeping...”

Luci draped her arm around Josie’s shoulder. “Hey, darlin’,” she said, “I know it seems bad now, but, as they say -- this too shall pass. Just keep your chin up; don’t let him get to you.” She gave Josie a squeeze. “Have you talked to Garren about all of this?”

Josie smiled and sniffed and lifted her head. “No. First of all, he’s on an island off the coast of Sicily for the next three months at least, and it would be nearly impossible to get in touch. He’s not answering e-mail, either. He told me. He and Aaron are insisting on absolutely no interruptions from the outside world. And besides,” she paused, “I don’t want to bother him with this. It will only upset him, and, after all, it’s not his fault. He deserves to enjoy his success. He’s not responsible for my life. He’s my friend, not my father.” She sipped her wine, and forced on a smile. “I think I just need to get a rein on all of this self-pity. It’s not very attractive, is it?” She laughed.

“Oh, Josie,” Luci said, “you couldn’t be unattractive if you tried. Just work hard; keep doing what you do well, and wait it out. It’ll be okay. I promise.” She gave Josie a big, supportive hug.

“So, what’s happening with you?” Josie asked, realizing she was being self-centered.

“Well, actually,” Luci said, smiling, “I wasn’t going to say anything because you’re so deep in the dumps...”

“No, go on,” Josie said, smiling her encouragement, “I’m not alone in the world. I want to hear what you’re up to.”

“I just landed Cora Durham as a client!” Luci could hardly sit still in her chair, she was so excited.

Josie almost fell off her chair. “You’re kidding! How did that happen? It’s amazing!”

Cora Durham was a star author of romantic fiction, who had written at least 30 books, each of them selling millions of copies. Acquiring her as a client was an enormous coup for Luci, and immediately put her in the big leagues.

“Well,” she said, “she’s been interested in writing slightly more serious material, but for years, her agent and publisher have convinced her she needs to stay with the tried-and-true, light-and-fluffy stuff. The last straw was when they did a massive rewrite of her last novel, taking out some of her best writing, because they said her readers weren’t up to it.”

Josie said, “so she’s going to write horror fiction or something?”

Luci laughed, “No, she’s going to be writing romantic fiction still, but she’s going to do some historical work, and lots more research. I’m convinced her readers will all come along with her, and enjoy it. We’re really just going to give her the freedom to write better.”

“And make millions in the process,” Josie joked.

“Exactly,” Luci said, clicking her glass into Josie’s. “So just keep your chin up, my dear. The next big thing is right around the corner, I know it.”

Chapter Three

Josie walked into the office the following morning with less than her normal enthusiasm. “How quickly things can change,” she thought to herself, as she pulled open the door with dread, thinking of only a week earlier, when she had opened the same door with excitement every day. Today, as she balanced a large cup of chai tea in one hand, and her tote bag in the other, she took a deep breath and plunged in. She barely noticed that Bianca wasn’t at her desk. Josie glanced at her message box, and saw there was nothing in it. That was very unusual, but not completely unheard of. “Hmm...” she thought, as she took a few steps toward her desk.

It struck her suddenly that something was very, very wrong. She saw Bianca was seated on a box next to Alexander’s desk, and it seemed Alexander was comforting her. Alexander was one of Josie’s fellow senior designers, and, as far as she knew, he wasn’t terribly close with Bianca. It surprised Josie to see him in such an intimate moment with her. As she approached them, they both looked up at her. Josie could see immediately that Alexander was upset, too. He wasn’t sobbing and rubbing his eyes with a tissue as Bianca was, but his eyes were red, and his expression was very, very serious.

“Oh, Josie,” Bianca said, getting up and turning to face her. She immediately lost it again, and buried her face in her tissue. Josie put her bag and cup down on a neighboring desk, and reached out to hold Bianca’s shoulder. She looked questioningly at Alexander, hoping he would tell her what was going on, since Bianca was obviously not capable of speaking.

“Josie, I have some bad news,” he said, looking shiftingly around the office, as though hoping someone else would appear who could take care of this for him. “Um, I don’t know how to tell you this, but there’s been an accident.”

“What kind of an accident?” she said, knowing those words too well. That phrase was never followed by anything other than life-changing news. Josie’s throat closed up with fear, and she felt her heartbeat increase dramatically. She could feel it beating out of her chest, and she wondered if it were visible through her blouse, so powerfully was it pounding.

“What are you talking about?” Josie said, her own voice sounding strange to her ears. The way Alexander was looking at her, with a mix of sadness, discomfort, and a little bit of fear was more frightening to her than all of Bianca’s howling.

“A plane crash,” Alexander said, pausing uncomfortably, “Garren’s plane.”

And there it was. Somehow she knew it all along, but she had been hoping against hope that it couldn’t possibly be true. But with Bianca crying, and Alexander also upset, Josie knew there was no other possible equation which could have those two so obviously upset at the same time. It was so impossibly, madly sad.

Josie felt as though the room were spinning. She put her hand out and steadied herself by gripping the edge of the desk on which she had just thrown her tote bag.

“Josie, are you okay?” Alexander said, as he reached out to steady her, as she had just steadied Bianca.

“Yes, I’m fine,” she said, looking around in a dazed fashion, wondering what she should do now. Surely there was something she should do. There was a lot of work on her desk, but somehow she wasn’t sure that was what she was supposed to be doing. Was there something else? She was used to working for Garren, but if there wasn’t any Garren anymore, then what was she supposed to be doing? Should she go home? Or should she call someone?

“Josie, seriously, are you okay?” it was Alexander’s voice, but it was coming from very far away. She couldn’t see him very well, anymore, either. “Whoa, I think she’s going to faint,” Josie heard these words from Alexander, but only just barely, before everything went very, very dark.

When she awoke, she was lying on the hard, brown leather couch in Sebastian’s office. Alexander was kneeling on the floor by her, holding a damp cloth on her forehead. “What happened?” Josie asked, as she began to sit up, and reached for the cloth. She took it off, and shook her head gently, but as soon as the words were out of her mouth, she already knew the answer. It all came flooding back so quickly. As Alexander began to speak, she quickly stopped him, and said, “never mind, I remember,” not wanting to hear him say it again. She was terribly embarrassed she had fainted, but more overcome by her heartbreak over the terrible news.

Just then, Sebastian came through the door of his own office, looking at the three of them as though they had been peeing on his carpet. “What are you all doing in here?” He reserved his ugliest look for Josie, who was seemingly comfortably sitting on his very expensive leather sofa. Before any of them had an opportunity to speak, he strode over to his desk, and put his briefcase down on its top with a lot more force than was necessary. “I don’t know how this office used to be run, but it’s probably important I tell you right now that I am not an ‘open door’ kind of boss, and, as an artist, I really prize my office surroundings as essential to the creative process. I do not wish to have such a close relationship with my employees that they feel they can just come into my private space whenever the spirit moves them, and casually ensconce themselves on my furniture.” He looked around at all of them quickly, as though trying to see if they had gotten the message. Assuming they had, he said, “you may all go now.”

Josie was unable to speak for a moment. Sebastian was a jerk, and she expected him to behave like one, but it was beyond her abilities right now to explain to him what was happening. She hadn’t cried yet, but she knew if she had to talk to Sebastian, she would. And she really didn’t want to cry in front of him, of all people.

Luckily, Alexander stepped in again and took the reins. The shock of the tragedy had surely made him bolder, because he was ordinarily very quiet and meek, and frightened to death of Sebastian. “We weren’t relaxing, Mr. Gálvez,” with a touch of venom in his voice Sebastian noticed. Sebastian turned around to face them, and put his hands on his hips. Before he could speak again, Alexander cut him off, “Garren Gruber is dead.” He let those words sink in for a few moments, and elaborated, “he was on a plane that crashed this morning. We all just found out.”

To Sebastian's credit, he at least looked suitably stunned. "I didn't know. How did you hear this?"

"One of his cousins called here this morning to let us know. Bianca found out and told me, and when Josie came in, she was very shocked and became dizzy."

Sebastian looked over at Josie and said, "I'm sorry." He looked around at the three of them, "I'm sorry for all of you. I know you were all very close."

Bianca began crying loudly again, "It's just so unfair. It's all so incredibly unfair. He was so happy! He just made the best deal of his life, and he was rich, and he was happy, and he was just starting out a whole other side of his life with Aaron. It's just so wrong."

"Oh my gosh," Josie said, "Aaron." That hadn't even occurred to her. Of course, Aaron was on the plane with Garren. Of course, Aaron was dead, too. Josie's temples began to throb again, and she leaned forward to cradle her head in her hands. She breathed deeply, and was determined not to faint again, especially in front of Sebastian. Bianca was so right, though, and the irony of the situation contributed to the sense of tragedy. Garren had been so excited. It was so incredibly unfair. How many people make a success of their lives to such an extent that they are able to retire at a young age, and enjoy their free time and their wealth in good health and security? The fact that Garren had been able to achieve such a notable goal, and then to have his life snatched away was beyond her imagination. Josie noticed tears were running down her cheeks. She pulled her head up, and brushed them away with her hand. Alexander dashed out to grab a box of tissues, and handed them to Josie.

Josie got up slowly from Sebastian's couch. Sebastian was still standing, and obviously wasn't quite sure what he should be saying. But Josie was quite sure he probably wanted them all out of his office. "I'm sorry, Mr. Gálvez, we'll clear out of your office." She was glad her voice sounded so steady. She wiped the last remaining tears away from her face, and walked out of the office with Alexander and Bianca. Other people had begun to arrive, and Alexander and Bianca began spreading the sad news. Josie went back to her desk, and listened as her co-workers found out one-by-one. She sat looking at her sketches, and listening to the crying and expressions of shock, and didn't quite know what to do with herself. She was hoping she could find some inner strength in the next few moments that would enable her to set a good example, and get back to her work. She wondered if she should perhaps gather her things again and head straight back out the door. It was difficult enough to imagine working here without Garren, but life without Garren completely? That she wasn't prepared for. She knew if she went home, though, she would have nothing to do but cry, and she wasn't ready for that yet. It was all still too fresh. She needed distraction more than anything else.

There was obviously nothing she could do in the way of mourning for Garren. She did have Garren's mother's telephone number, and she had met her before, but she really didn't want to call her yet. Josie knew how close Garren was with his mother, and she knew his mother must be devastated this morning. Josie determined she would call this evening when Garren's family had a chance to let the news sink in. Josie went off to the ladies' room and splashed cold water on her face. There were two or three other ladies there, doing the same thing... trying to get

themselves together after receiving the sad news. They all knew Garren wasn't going to be around anymore, but no one was prepared to deal with this kind of finality.

After Josie had freshened her face, she didn't feel better, but she felt more able to deal with her day. She still had a full day of work, unless Sebastian decided to close the office. It would probably be the right thing to do, and it was something Josie herself would have done if she had been in charge, but she had no reasonable expectation of Sebastian coming to that same conclusion.

Josie went back to her desk and determinedly pulled out a file. She put it open in front of her, and put her hands on either side of her head, as she forced herself to pay attention to it. She moved one sketch aside after studying it, and then turned her attention to the next. It was easier with each sketch to attempt to make sense of it, and get her thoughts together. Every few moments, the noise of shocked, disbelieving chatter in the office, louder than the usual hum, would intrude into her consciousness, but she was able to tune it out for the most part.

The image of Garren kept appearing before her eyes as well. She thought of his ebullience, his innate happiness, and his creative genius. It made tears well up in her eyes once or twice, but she was able to blink those tears away.

She heard some small commotion behind her, and turned around. The door of Sebastian's office swung open, and he came out of his office. He had been there all morning behind closed doors, on the telephone. He stood in front of his office, and clapped his hands together, to gain everyone's attention. People slowly turned around, a bit puzzled, because they had never been summoned that way before. Once Sebastian was satisfied he had the sufficient amount of attention he required, he put his hands onto his hips and spoke. "This is a sad day. A terrible, terrible sad day. It's difficult to know how to express what we are all feeling. Since I am so new, and didn't know Gruber very well, my feelings are obviously not as strong as your feelings. But I am not without emotion, and not without sympathy for you. I have given some thought to closing the office in Gruber's memory, and I have been discussing with our corporate headquarters whether that is an appropriate thing to do. It was my idea that we should close doors and go home to be alone with our memories. However, business interests have intruded, and this does not appear feasible. I would like to offer a solution that should please you all. We will not completely close doors today, but we will close the office today at 3:00 p.m. instead of the more traditional 5:00 p.m. I hope that any of you that have deadlines, and who cannot afford for these reasons to leave early, will feel free to stay and complete your work without my thinking any less of you." With that, he turned and headed back into his office, clearly under the impression he had been magnanimous.

Josie didn't think anything could make her want to laugh today. She was wrong. It was quite the funniest thing that could have happened. She imagined Garren himself would have slapped his leg and howled with laughter. Sebastian couldn't have been more perfectly himself. Josie chuckled softly to herself, as she began making her notes with respect to the sketches she had been reviewing. Alexander drifted by her desk, not wishing to be seen gossiping by Sebastian. He stopped nonchalantly next to her, and leaned over, with his hand on the desk, seemingly looking at her work. "Can you believe this guy?" he said.

“Yes, actually, I can,” she said, “You forget that I knew him at Parsons. I honestly think he believes he’s being extraordinarily giving and kind. I wouldn’t let it bother you.”

“I’m not, but I swear he was laughing in there.”

“What do you mean?” Josie asked.

“I mean I swear I saw him laughing in there. I have a really good angle from my desk, and I glanced over at one point to see what he was doing. I was kind of hoping he would close the office immediately, and I wanted to see if there was any evidence of that. But...” he paused, “he was sitting at his desk, with his chair tipped back, and the telephone at his ear, and he was laughing. I mean,” he said, “I know he didn’t know Garren, but he shouldn’t have been laughing heartily this morning of all mornings. Even if he didn’t mean anything by it, it just doesn’t seem right.”

Josie felt her face get warm. She agreed it didn’t seem right. How callous and unfeeling Sebastian was. She wouldn’t be surprised if Sebastian were secretly relieved there was a finality to Garren’s reign at the firm. She swallowed quickly, and attempted to maintain her composure. “Well, it certainly doesn’t reflect well on him, but I’m sure he doesn’t see it that way. I don’t know if he is able to see things the way we see them. It’s possible it’s a cultural thing, and it’s just his way of coping.” Josie tried hard not to judge Sebastian too harshly, but she was bothered all the same. Not wanting to contribute to gossip, however, she kept those feelings to herself.

Alexander, who did enjoy gossiping a little bit, was obviously disappointed by Josie’s reply, and said, “Well, I suppose so, but it just doesn’t seem right.”

Josie watched as Alexander scooted to another co-worker’s desk, obviously to get a more satisfactory reply to his criticism. She turned her attention back to her work, and tried to lose herself in it until the end of the day.

That night was spent almost constantly on the telephone. She spoke with her friends who didn’t know yet, she spoke with some of the friends she and Garren had together, and finally, she spoke briefly with Garren’s brother, Jacob. Apparently, Garren’s mother wasn’t up to a conversation, but Garren’s brother was very sweet. Josie was able to tell him how much Garren had meant to her, both personally and professionally, and she felt much better after having been able to get that off her chest. The funeral plans were laid out, and the finality of it gave Josie some comfort. It would take a few days longer than usual, because of the unfortunate details and practical matters involved with an airplane crash in a foreign country. As she put the telephone down on the final call of the night, she sat back and sank into the cushions on her couch. She wondered why she hadn’t yet had a breakdown. Thinking of Garren was just too painful, and she felt as though she had been going through her conversations robotically, saying what needed to be said. She worried that perhaps a bigger breakdown was on the way. Right now, though, she pulled her cashmere throw blanket over her shoulders, and curled up, prepared to fall asleep on the couch in case anyone else called.

Sebastian had set aside the morning of the funeral to close the office, but didn't have the decency to also close so employees could attend the daytime wakes for Garren. Josie took the time off and went anyway. It was sad, but, as with all funerals, it was helpful for everyone who loved the departed to get together and reminisce, share stories, and sometimes even laugh. Josie also made time to go across town and attend Aaron's wake as well. It wasn't as widely attended, but his family was every bit as devastated as Garren's family.

The morning of the funeral dawned gloomy and damp. Josie thought it was singularly appropriate. It would have been a gloomy day even with blazing sunshine. Dressed all in black, Josie strode into the funeral parlor, and saw an enormous crowd. "What a great tribute to Garren," she thought. She looked around and saw colleagues, competitors and many, many clients. She hoped the knowledge that Garren was so appreciated was some small comfort to his mother. She came around the corner, working her way through the crowd, and saw Garren's mother surrounded by a protective crowd of well-wishers, and she was glad. Garren's mother looked up and caught Josie's eye. "Josie," she called, and Josie immediately went over to her. She reached out her hand, and Garren's mother caught it in her own, patting it gently. "Oh, Josie, it's such a sad day," she said, "but it's so nice to see how many people are here."

"I was just thinking the same thing," Josie said. "It's a great tribute to Garren. I'm sure if he were here, he would be having a great time."

Garren's mother laughed. "It's true. It's really true. It's so sad that he was taken away, though -- just when things were going so wonderfully well for him. It's so terribly, terribly unfair." She began to tear up, and brought her handkerchief up to the corner of her eye.

"I know," Josie said, "it's true. It's what everyone's been saying." She reached up to rub Mrs. Gruber's shoulder, and excused herself so others could talk to her.

Josie turned around and saw the large, ebony casket again. The first time she saw it, at the wake, it made her terribly uncomfortable. It still did, but she had gotten used to it. It was hard to imagine Garren lying inside, and Josie didn't want to. She preferred to remember how full of life and energy he always was. She turned away from the casket, and began to make the rounds, saying "hello" to the people she knew.

While Josie was taking care of her social duties, Garren's brother Jacob came up behind her and tapped her on the shoulder. "Josie, hi," he said.

She turned around and gave him a hug. "Jacob, how are you?" she asked, reaching up to rub his shoulder.

"I'm doing alright," he said. "It's going to be a tough day, but we'll get through it. I just wondered," he said, "do you know this Gálvez character?"

"Yes, he's my new boss," Josie said.

"Do you know that he asked to give the eulogy?"

“What?” Josie said, very surprised. Diplomatically, she replied, “That’s seems a bit unusual.”

“A bit cheeky is what it is,” he said, “he didn’t even know Garren. He said he thought it was his responsibility. I assured him that it wasn’t. What a jerk.”

Josie laughed, “I can almost hear in my imagination how that conversation went.”

“Well, it’s amazing what a death in the family will bring out,” Jacob said, “but now that I see him, I just want to punch him in the face. I swear I saw him handing out business cards.”

“Oh, for crying out loud,” Josie said. She wasn’t terribly surprised, but she couldn’t find it in her heart to apologize for this latest example of Sebastian’s ignorance. “I’m sure he wants everybody to know the firm hasn’t died with Garren, but it’s a tacky method of getting that message across.”

Jacob brushed the matter aside, and said, “Well... there certainly are a lot of people here today. It’s wonderful. My mother tells me there are some very important people here, too.” He laughed, and said, “I’m sure I’m supposed to recognize some of these people, but I don’t. I’m an accountant, and that’s about as exciting as my life gets. Garren was always the one to know everybody. He was always the life of the party.” Jacob reached into his breast pocket and pulled out a handkerchief, which he quickly wiped his eyes with. “It’s just so sad, Josie. He was such a great guy, and he was so happy. Everything was going so well.”

Josie put her hand on his shoulder. “I know.” She choked up herself, and wasn’t able to speak further. She noticed several family members making their way toward Jacob, and she took that moment to excuse herself. She stepped off to the side to take a deep breath, and felt a tap on her back. She turned around to see Beverly Glazer, one of Garren’s favorite clients. She was dressed head-to-toe in black, and her shiny blond bob was held back by a pair of Chanel black wrap-around sunglasses. She dabbed at the inner corner of one eye with her lacy handkerchief, and held her arms out to Josie. “Oh, Josie,” she said, “how will we ever go on?”

Josie smiled despite herself as she hugged Mrs. Glazer. She was the consummate actress, and a drama queen extraordinaire. Garren had adored her. They had worked together on all of her homes. She bought and sold her homes more often than most people changed automobiles, and Garren was called in to take care of it all for her. They had enjoyed a great working relationship and a great friendship as well. “Mrs. Glazer,” Josie said, “I’m so sorry for your loss. I know how much you and Garren meant to each other.”

“Oh, you have no idea. It’s just too horrible. I was distraught enough when I knew Garren wasn’t going to design anymore. I was already in mourning. I just bought a new house in the Hamptons, though.”

“Oh, yes,” Josie said, “I remember hearing about that earlier this year.”

Mrs. Glazer looked puzzled for a moment, then said, “Oh, no. This is a different house. Anyway... Garren had practically promised he would come out of retirement to take care of it for me. I don’t know what I’m going to do now. I don’t even want the house anymore. I think I’ll just have the entire thing burned to the ground in Garren’s honor.”

Josie doubted it would come to that, but just hummed agreeably until Mrs. Glazer saw another friend in the group. Josie smiled as she saw Mrs. Glazer approach another blond-bobbed socialite, “Oh, Martha,” she said, “how will we ever go on?”

As she took a deep breath and looked around the gathering, she thought Garren would have liked it very much. There was a proper smattering of employees and colleagues. All of Garren’s former competitors were in evidence, as well as Sebastian, his replacement. There was also an impressive collection of Garren’s former clients (nearly all female), twittering and chatting among themselves.

Josie drifted back in time for moment, and remembered sharing hilarious gossip sessions with Garren. He was famously discreet, so some of his clients foolishly told him everything. “You would think I had to have a psychiatric certification along with a design degree,” he would say. He was not so discreet, however, that he wouldn’t, after a couple of cocktails, regale those closest to him with stories of secret marriages, out-of-wedlock pregnancies, and various affairs. Josie looked across the room and observed one rather famous young socialite talking with a group of her equally illustrious friends in the corner. Josie smiled as she thought of Garren laughing and rolling off the couch in his beautiful, lavish 10-room apartment on the corner of Sixty-ninth and Lexington. They had spent so many evenings there, enjoying a late dinner, and then a cocktail or two before Garren sent Josie home in one of the firm’s account cars. This one particular evening, Garren had just finished working on a Park Avenue duplex for this same lovely socialite and her new husband, and he was telling Josie about the completion of the work, but also what he had heard about the couple’s beginnings of married life. “Apparently,” he said, “this young lady had no idea of how a person obtains a venereal disease. She had been diagnosed with chlamydia, after having had some peculiar itching and discomfort.”

“Oh, yuck, Garren,” Josie had said, wrinkling her nose.

“It seems her parents had been particularly careful with her upbringing, and had sent her to only the strictest, finest convents and parochial schools for her education.” He had leaned in toward Josie to tell this last part, “It would appear, however, the sisters who had tended to her education had left some more personal, rather unseemly matters out of her schooling, and she’d had no opportunity to pick them up elsewhere, not even on television.”

“Poor thing. What are you getting at, Garren?” Josie had asked.

“Her husband told her she must have gotten chlamydia from the pool at the club they attended. He forbade her from ever swimming there again, and she hasn’t!” Garren held his stomach in with his laughter. “I was dying when she told me, right when I began this job nine months ago, because she was warning me not to swim there when I visited with a friend of mine. I was dying to tell her truth, but I didn’t have the heart, nor did I think it was place. I suspect

someone has straightened the poor thing out, because she called me today to ask me to come back and re-do the master suite for her, and to do some more customization on the guest suite, because that's where her new husband will be sleeping."

"Oh," Josie said, "that's awful. I guess it goes to show you that having money doesn't ensure happiness."

"No, but it does ensure you'll be able to afford moving your husband to the other side of the apartment."

Josie chuckled to herself as she thought of this conversation. She looked again at the lovely young lady in question, and hoped she was happy now, in her gorgeous new apartment. She hoped she had found some kind of peace with her philandering, diseased, lying husband, since Josie had heard nothing at all about a divorce being in the offing. Just to maintain respectability, a split wouldn't probably be initiated for several years, anyway. Divorce was still very much frowned-upon in their social set.

People began to take their seats as the minister walked to the podium, and made himself ready by reviewing his notes. Josie sat near the middle, on an aisle, and watched as Garren's mother and brother took their seats. She noticed Aaron's parents in the seats behind, and was glad they were able to make it. How tragic they had another funeral to attend, that of their own son, the following day. As she watched, she observed Sebastian take a seat in the front row. Her breath caught in her throat briefly, but she was immediately relieved as she saw Garren's brother get up from his chair and speak to Sebastian. Whatever he said, Sebastian didn't like it. He looked rather perturbed, but he got up immediately, straightened his jacket, and walked a few rows back, and took a seat there. Garren's brother caught Josie's glance, and rolled his eyes. "What an ass Sebastian is," Josie thought, "how can he not realize it and try to make adjustments?"

She turned her attention to the minister, who had just tested the microphone, and cleared his throat in a polite command for silence. A mobile telephone rang at the back of the room, but was immediately snuffed amidst quite a bit of shushing. Josie watched as people began quickly to dig in their own pockets and handbags, in order to quiet their own ring tones. "New York City," Josie thought with amusement.

The minister cleared his throat again, and began the service. It was a lovely, traditional service. The Unitarian minister managed to mention Garren's relationship with Aaron without stressing it. Garren's brother got up to speak a few words about growing up with his brother, and told a few anecdotes that made people laugh. The minister again rose to wind up the service, and invite everyone to the Pierre Hotel for a luncheon. Garren's mother looked at the minister raptly, and Josie was happy she was enjoying the service. Josie knew Garren's mother had been uncomfortable with her son's sexuality, but had come to terms with it years before.

Josie got up from her seat with all the rest, and slowly started making her way toward the door. Agnes Monfrey, another one of Garren's beloved and valued clients, came up behind and slid her hand beneath Josie's elbow. "How are you getting to the luncheon, dear?"

Josie turned to smile, "I was going to catch a cab."

"Nonsense," Mrs. Monfrey said, "my car's just out front. Come with me."

*Josie Saville is a beautiful 27-year-old woman, and an apprentice interior designer for some of the finest families in New York City. Having been orphaned at an early age, she has made her own way in the world, and has carved out a place for herself with her talent, and her love for her job. She has a great social life in New York City, with glamorous and successful female friends. Her life is turned upside-down when her beloved boss sells his design firm to a luxury-goods conglomerate and then is killed in a tragic airplane crash.*

*Can Josie start all over again, and form the plan to begin her own business? As she diligently puts the pieces together, and works long into every night to make it happen, she meets a handsome, intelligent man who sweeps her off her feet. But is he the right man for her?*



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