

Perfect Together

By Kristen Ashley

Teaser Chapters

Prologue

I Know

Wyn

“You...have a place?”

“Apartment, yeah,” he grunted.

“You’ve rented an apartment.”

It was a statement, and the pain in it was not veiled.

Hearing it was why my husband of nineteen years looked from placing some of his folded T-shirts into one of his Tumi cases, to me.

His next wasn’t a grunt, it was gentle and sweet, and butchering when he repeated, “Yeah.”

“So, we’re done,” I said tonelessly.

He straightened from his packing, “Wyn—”

“Like so much else in our lives, *you* have decided we’re done.”

His beautiful, full lips thinned.

But he didn’t answer.

The suitcase on our bed that he was packing, the leather bag he used for weekenders already crammed full, zipped shut and sitting on the floor, his workout bag the same, the Tumi carry-on the same, his empty part of the closet and currently emptying drawers...

These were his answer.

“There’s no talking about this? Working this out?” I asked.

“We’ve talked ad nauseam. We’ve—”

I leaned his way and grated out, “Nineteen *fucking* years, Remy. You’re just throwing that away?”

I could see immediately he was getting angry (I mean, it was actually *twenty-one* fucking years, including dating, engagement, so of course I would).

“I’m not throwing dick away, Wyn.”

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I glanced pointedly at each bag that told a different tale.

“You never took a goddamn thing I said seriously,” he noted.

Okay, now *I* was getting angry.

“Are you insane?” I demanded.

“Were you in California last weekend?” he asked.

I felt my hair sway as my back went ramrod straight.

“I asked you not to go, you went,” he bit out.

“You *told* me not to go, and it was work, I couldn’t *not* go. So yes, I went.”

“You can do whatever the fuck you want, Wyn, you own the goddamned company. That includes saying no and sending someone else.”

“And how, precisely, do I say no to Fiona Remington?”

“You open your mouth and form the letters n and o.”

I stood there, staring at the man I’d shared a bed with for decades, the father of my three children, and I felt cold creep over my skin.

“I’m on the cover of the top magazine in my business, for fuck’s sake,” he stated. “On it for winning that award this weekend, and my daughter was my date because my wife was kissing ass in Hollywood.”

That cold grew icy.

“You don’t want to do this, Remy,” I warned. “There’s no coming back from this.”

“Of course I don’t want to do this, Wyn,” he spat. “But you’ve given me no choice.”

Oh no, he did *not*.

I swung an arm out to the Tumi. “So this is on me?”

“The city of fucking *Phoenix* gave me an award, Wyn, and you were not *here*.”

“The highest-paid, most critically acclaimed actor in Hollywood asked me to style her for awards season, Remy, and she had this one window to sit down for a consultation before she’s off to Algiers to begin a punishing three-month shoot, and she won’t step foot on American soil until two days before the award shows begin. So I needed to be *there*.”

“Yeah,” he said, the finality in that syllable like a crush of stones landing on my head. “You did.”

After he spoke those words, he walked back to the dresser and emptied the drawer.

As he shoved the tees in with the others, I whispered, “There’s no coming back from this, Remy.”

He didn’t look at me as he flipped the suitcase shut, zipped it, and then tugged it from the bed.

Only when he had both bags over his shoulders, the suitcases tipped to their wheels—strong and fit, my rugby-playing husband, he didn’t seem weighed down at all with a representation of our entire life hanging off his shoulders—did his eyes find mine so he could give me an answer.

And that answer was not his words.

“I know.”

That answer was my tall, strong, handsome husband walking out our bedroom door.

Chapter One

Walgreens

Wyn

Three years later...

“Typical alphahole bullshit. Typical Remy, yanking your chain like this.”

I was in my car.

My friend Bea’s voice was sounding from the speakers.

And my heart just stopped beating.

This situation was obviously acute, so I made the first right turn I could, into a Walgreens parking lot.

I parked.

And I tried to get my heart beating again.

Though, this was hard since my mind was working triple-time.

“I mean, what in *the* fuck? You just cannot shake this jackoff loose,” Bea kept ranting.

I stared at my windshield, deep breathing.

“I mean,” she carried on, as I was just then realizing she was wont to do, “he walked out on you and three kids. He couldn’t let that be his Dick of the Century finale?”

“Sabre called this family meeting, Bea. Remy didn’t,” I told her something I’d already told her.

“Why does it have to be at Remy’s house?” she shot back.

Why did she care?

“I don’t know,” I replied. “I didn’t quiz Sabre on the whys and wherefores. My eldest son has never asked us all to get together. I’m more preoccupied with Sabre calling a meeting at all, and it being so important he’s driving up from Tucson with Manon, and what that might mean, than nagging him about why he picked his dad’s house.”

“Well, I know why,” she declared.

And she did.

This was why my heart had stopped beating.

Because she knew everything about everything.

And when this skill she had came down to me, it was everything about Remy and why he was always behaving one step up from caveman.

Or one step below dick.

Or jackoff.

Or motherfucker.

Or asshole/alphahole (that second one was her favorite).

There was no denying Remy was an alpha. There was also no denying he was hypermasculine. And last, there was no denying these things had an effect on our marriage.

But there was further no denying they were both part of the reason why I fell in love with and married him in the first place.

Bea went on to tell me why Sabre had called the meeting at his dad’s.

“Because he wants that bitch there.”

Okay.

I was not a big fan of Remy’s live-in girlfriend, Myrna. She and I didn’t often have opportunities to be in each other’s space, but when we were, we avoided each other like the plague. And I (quietly) did not like her due to some of the things Manon, my daughter, told me about her. (Suffice it to say, Manon didn’t like Myrna either—it wasn’t hate, but there was not a lot of love lost between the two.)

But I wasn’t hip on calling another woman a bitch unless she was categorically, well...a bitch.

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And as far as I knew, Myrna wasn't that.

At least not categorically.

"If he does, wouldn't it make sense that he'd call the meeting at Remy's?" I asked, the words coming out of my mouth even as I wondered why in the heck I was explaining family things to Bea in a manner I was actually *defending* them. "He'd hardly ask Remy and Myrna to my house."

"Remy has no problem showing up at your house," she pointed out, but I wasn't sure why.

Though, it did get me to thinking, because no, he didn't have a problem with this.

Even if we barely had anything to discuss anymore. All the important decisions had been made, and now our kids were old enough to make their own.

Yves, a senior in high school, was the only one home, but he had a car. He stayed where he wanted when he wanted, and he spent just as much time with Remy as he did with me.

As for Sabre and Manon, they were both down in Tucson at the University of Arizona, but like Yves, they had cars, and when they were home, they stayed where they wanted, when they wanted.

And the truth of that was that Manon was often with me, not only because she wasn't a fan of Myrna's, and Sabre stayed with his dad, because he and Remy (along with Yves), were two (three) peas in a pod.

It was just that Yves was at a time in his life where he still needed Mom *and* Dad.

Manon was sallying forth in this world as a young woman, and therefore, she needed me.

And Sabre was at a time where it appeared he needed to be around his dad.

I found this all entirely natural and had no qualms with it.

Of course, I'd like to see my first son more. But even if he slept at his father's house, he was like Manon: his life was so busy, sleep was mostly all he did there.

We had our mother/son times. It wasn't like he ignored me. Just as Manon spent quality time with her dad.

But Remy did often show at my house to "discuss things."

I didn't have a chance to get a lock on remembering what those things were in my present moment.

Bea was, as I was just then noting was her usual, on a roll.

"So you have to be around *her* during a *family meeting*, which is a *slap in the face*."

“I honest to God don’t know why we’re having this conversation. It’s none of your business what Sabre wants or what I decide to do about it.”

Those words came out mostly because I was ticked, and I had the tendency to get ticked at the drop of hat. As such, I didn’t tend to allow myself a second to think on that emotion before I did something about it.

And in that second, I considered how that might have affected a number of things in my life, and...

Damn.

“Did you just say that to me?” she asked, sounding deeply wounded.

“Bea, you phoned and asked me over for wine, pizza and Netflix, and I told you I couldn’t because I had this meeting then I had to get to the warehouse. It’s kickoff night. You know we have a ritual on kickoff night. Then you started in on Remy, and Sabre, and Myrna, and really, I must say that I don’t know where this vitriol comes from. But I’m worried my son is going to tell me he got some girl pregnant, or he’s decided to change his major even though he’s graduating in May, or something like that. And you’re spewing loathing for Remy when our divorce has been final for two years and we’ve both moved on.”

“First, if you remember, *he* divorced *you*, and *you did not want that*,” she retorted. “And second, ask yourself, Wyn, have you moved on? Have you *really* moved on?”

Okay, now I wasn’t ticked.

I was mad.

I was also freaked at her second point.

And those, for me, were not a good mix.

“I can’t even begin to imagine why you’d remind me Remy was the one who divorced me,” I stated coolly.

“Because it’s like you forgot he ripped your heart out and crushed it under his boot, this after he’d kicked it around for ten years.”

“And as a friend you feel it’s your job to remind me of that?” I asked.

“Well, *yeah*,” she answered.

“I think we need to stop talking,” I told her.

“I disagree, since you’re driving over to his house because Sabre is growing up to be a chip off the old block.”

Oh no.

Hell no.

“Think about what you just said to me,” I whispered.

But I wasn’t done.

Boy, was I *so* not done.

“Now, I listened to you verbally abuse my husband for ten years,” I continued. “And I’m going to have to have a think about that. But do not mistake me and do not miss this message, Bea. Listen carefully. Never...*ever*...speak badly about my son, to me or *anyone*.”

With that, I hung up and I stared at my dash, fuming.

Bea rang right back.

I refused the call.

Okay.

Okay, okay, okay.

Heck, now my mind was working quadruple-time.

Put this aside, Wyn, I cut into my own raging thoughts to tell myself. Get it together. Get to Remy’s. You’re running late. You always run late. He hates that.

He did.

He’d tease me about it in the beginning. The first three, four, five, ten (okay, fifteen) years of our marriage.

Then, it annoyed him, and he let that show.

Not long later, around about the time he left, it pissed him off, and he let me know.

My response?

I took it as my tall, dark, gorgeous husband still being tall, dark and gorgeous, and I was the mom of three babies. I still carried baby weight even after they were nowhere near being babies. He was no longer doing the appreciative up-and-down that told me the extra fifteen minutes were *so* worth it, and he was going to show me just how much when we got home.

No, I was no longer his hot wife he couldn’t keep his hands off.

I was the fat mother of his kids he didn’t have any patience for.

I was also the starting-her-own-business woman who suddenly needed ten more hours in the day to continue to fold his laundry, get the grocery shopping done and look decent for his client dinners.

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The interior of my Range Rover rang again, and as it was Bea, I didn't accept the call.

But I made one to someone else in our posse, top spot bestie shared with my other top spot, Bernice.

The call was to Kara.

She picked up on ring three.

"Oh hell, a call before Sabre's meeting," she said as greeting. "Are you okay?"

That was Kara.

It would be Bernice too.

Are you okay?

Not, *Typical Remy bullshit.*

"Do you think I haven't moved on from Remy?" I blurted.

"Uhhhhh," she drew that out then asked, "Let me guess, Bea phoned."

I blinked.

"She's blowing up mine, by the way," she said.

"I just told her off," I shared.

Kara said nothing.

"She was ranting about Remy," I continued.

"How am I not surprised?" she muttered.

"Right?" I stated. "Is she like, *unhealthily* committed to bitching about my ex-husband?"

"She is not a card-carrying member of the Remy Gastineau fan club, no."

I forged ahead, even if it was tentatively, "And has she not been that for a very long time?"

Kara again was silent.

"She hates him," I said softly. "Things fell apart with him and that's bad enough for me. I don't need her being really mean about it."

"Bea is a woman who has no issues speaking her mind," Kara noted.

"Yes, and that should be encouraged, but filters also should be in place. For instance, not bitching about my ex then rolling that into priming herself to begin bitching about my son who you think is acting like my ex."

"She didn't," Kara breathed.

"She did," I confirmed. "It wasn't overt, but considering she can't stand Remy, calling Sabre a chip off the old block, I got the gist."

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“Holy crap.”

“Yeah,” I agreed.

“Sabre *is* a chip off the old block, so is Yves, but in very good ways because you and Remy didn’t work out, but…”

She hesitated.

It felt like my ears might start bleeding, I was listening so hard.

“When he wasn’t being up his own ass, Remy was a really good guy,” she finished carefully.

I stared at the building that sat in front of my car.

“I’m gonna call Bernice,” Kara said gently. “I think we need a Cock and Snacktails night.”

Bernice, in a previous incarnation, had been a flight attendant. And she’d been on a flight where one of her colleagues had screwed up the cabin announcement once they’d leveled off, not stating the attendants would be serving “snacks and cocktails,” but instead that they’d be serving “cock and snacktails.”

This was already hilarious.

It got better when Bernice started serving, and she asked some little old lady what she wanted, and the lady pointed in the air to indicate the announcement and ordered, “What she said.”

Since that flight, and Bernice relating this story, any night where we got together and had cocktails and munchies, we called Cock and Snacktails night.

But outside of the night we had them two days after Remy left me, the night after Remy served me with papers, the night after Bernice’s husband confessed to cheating on her (not whole hog, he’d just kissed another woman, but, trust me, that was almost a worse betrayal than taking it to the limit), I felt right now I needed Cock and Snacktails more than ever.

“I let him come over and we bicker about stupid shit, Kara,” I admitted softly, even though she knew this. “Manon going over her monthly budget and how much of that goes to Starbucks, and how my then twenty-year-old son really wasn’t old enough to do a cross country drive with his buds, though he was. It’s like we make up shit to bicker about.”

All Kara said was, “Cock and Snacktails,” which set my gut to twisting.

Because I knew she didn’t want to get into it then, since there was a lot to get into because she agreed with me.

“I’m holding on to him,” I said in horror. “He’s moved on. Has the bachelor pad he’s always wanted. The petite, beautiful, free-spirited, younger woman. And I’m holding on to him, giving

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Manon extra money, defending her right to copiously caffeinate, forbidding Sabre to have something he really wants, and my son is mature, smart, it is something he should have without me making it a headache and a huge discussion with his dad.”

“Cock,” Kara said slowly, “and Snacktails, sister.”

I looked down to my dash again and saw the time.

I was supposed to be at Remy’s house in five minutes and I was, in the current traffic, a good fifteen, twenty minutes away.

Even noting this, I could not get past the epiphany that was assaulting my head.

“I told him when he walked out on me, he couldn’t come back, and he was good with that,” I shared. “But even if those words came out, I never let him go.”

“Wyn, honey, go see what’s up with Sabre. And then it’s kickoff night, yeah?”

Of course, she remembered.

Bea didn’t.

Kara did.

“Yes,” I confirmed.

“Be with your staff, open that champagne, toast the latest box of fabulousness your twenty thousand subscribers are going to love that you curated for them as the preeminent stylist of Hollywood, Bollywood, and everything in between. In the meantime, I’ll get with Bernice, and we’ll set a time to have girl time. Is there any night you can’t do it? Or should I call Noel?”

Noel was my assistant.

Noel had decided he wanted to live the life of *Devil Wears Prada* without (I hoped) the devil part. Therefore, Noel had a self-imposed duty of being on twenty-four, seven.

And I could be dramatic. But I once picked up my own dry cleaning on a Saturday because I was in the same strip mall, and he’d lost his mind in a way we did not want a repeat.

Truth?

It was no skin off my nose my PA felt picking up my dry cleaning was his sacred duty.

So I let him.

In other words, I answered the only way I could, considering the last time I put something in my own schedule was two weeks into Noel’s employment (and we didn’t want a repeat of that either).

“You better call Noel.”

Kara started laughing.

I felt my lips tip up, because I adored her, and Noel and his foibles meant he made it his mission to take care of me.

But I had, at most, twenty minutes to come to terms with something earth-shattering.

I had, at most, twenty minutes to finally let go of the love of my life.

“I gotta go, I’m going to be late to the meeting,” I said to Kara.

She read my tone, which wasn’t exactly beaten, but it wasn’t far from it.

“I’ll tell Noel it’s emergency planning, okay?” she asked.

“Okay. Thanks for listening.”

“Anytime and every time. Love you, babe.”

“Love you back, babe.”

We hung up and the instant I saw her call fade from the screen on my dash, I saw something else.

And heard something.

“Hang on a second, baby.”

I turned and looked at the big, amazing-looking guy sitting on the barstool. The guy who had been smiling at me as I walked to and by him.

“You did not just walk by me.”

I had.

Even as he’d smiled at me, I’d walked right by Remy, never thinking once that gorgeous man was smiling at me that way because he wanted me to stop.

But he didn’t let me walk away from him without giving him my number.

He was so confident, so sure of himself, I’d never met a man like him.

From the second he spoke to me, I was drunk on his attention.

We’d had our first date the very next night.

I’d slept with him on our third date, which was three nights later, a Friday, and I hadn’t left all weekend.

Over the next two years I’d moved in with him, got engaged to him and married him.

After that, I’d given him babies.

After that, we’d raised them.

In the beginning, it was heaven.

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In every way, we were perfect.

Perfect together.

But eventually, we did not drift apart. We broke apart.

And then he shattered us.

Ever since, I'd been sitting among the pieces trying to figure out how to start the process of gluing us back together.

While Remy had bought his mid-century pad, kitted it out with a personal style only an award-winning architect could pull off, and gone on with his life, falling in love with and introducing our family to another woman.

And I had to come to grips with that. Right now.

So it was going to make me later, but I checked the clock.

And I did what I did when I had to do something that didn't fit into my life, my schedule, the load I carried.

I gave myself five full minutes to feel it.

This meant I sobbed in the parking lot for two minutes.

I struggled with pulling my shit together for two minutes.

I dried my tears and did my best to fix my face for a minute.

Then I pulled out of the parking lot and left Walgreens—and the love of my life—behind.

Chapter Two

Hugh Hefner

Wyn

Pulling up to the curb in front of Remy's house, it was not the first time I considered how deeply it sucked that his house was so cool.

Once Manon left for school, I did things to the home Remy and I had raised the kids in. Things that gave me the world's best bathroom and closet, but it usurped two bedrooms.

Even if her room was one of them, Manon was all over it.

She helped me with the design and was perfectly okay staying in the “guest” bedroom (because I let her redecorate, so it was mostly all her, just a more sophisticated, mature her). An additional carrot on that stick was that it had an en suite.

Sabre bunked with Yves whenever he stayed with me, something Yves was down with, but Sabre was upset I’d destroyed his bedroom even though he’d said, “I’m never moving back home,” approximately five hundred times in the months before, and then the years after he’d gone to school.

Not to mention, when he wasn’t cross-countrying it with his bros, he was camping with them, in Rocky Point with them, playing rugby with his league, interning at different firms (including his father’s), dating copious “babes”, or staying with his father.

Oh yeah, and when Remy heard about the renovations, he came over and we didn’t bicker about it.

He’d lost his damned mind and nearly shouted the house down about how “irrational” it was to take a house from a five-bedroom to a three-bedroom, and “...in this neighborhood, you’re flushing a hundred thousand dollars right down the toilet, Wyn.”

“Considering I’m *dying* in this house, Remy, what do I care?” I’d shot back. “The kids will bury me, sell it, and put their children through college with the proceeds. It’s a win for them in a time hopefully they’ll be so full of grief, they won’t give a damn about a hundred thousand dollars.”

“Bullshit, woman...” (And by the by, we’ll just say I was never, *ever* a fan of when the word “woman” came out of my ex-husband’s mouth, pre-divorce, but definitely not when he was yelling at me after it), “...when Yves is out, you’re either going direct to a high-rise with a concierge and a valet that parks your fucking car for you or you’re moving to LA. You intend to die in this house, my ass.”

As long as even one of my children was in Phoenix, *my* ass was in the Valley of the Damned Sun.

However, he might not be wrong, because I’d never considered it until he mentioned it, but someone valeting my car when I came home sounded heavenly.

I did not share that.

I said, “Considering I bought you out of this property and it’s only my name on the title, darling, what on earth does it matter to you?”

“Stop fucking calling me ‘darling.’ You know I hate it. It’s fucked-up New York Fashion Week bullshit.”

“I know it is,” I confirmed. “I also know how much you detest it, *darling*, so clue in. I use it to *piss you off* when you’re *pissing me off* in hopes you’ll get so pissed off, you’ll *take off*.”

Oh yes.

We had a very healthy divorce, Remy and me.

We won’t get into the argument we had when Sabre told him I was changing back to my maiden name.

My business name was still simply *Wyn Gastineau*, it had an “Inc.” behind it officially, but not as it was known in the biz. It was my name, the end.

But I legally went back to Wyn Byrne personally.

I did this after Myrna moved in with Remy.

Okay, since it was on my mind, we’ll get into it.

It went like this.

Remy: “So, you’re punishing me for being with someone else?”

I was, of a sort.

Me (in denial, not only to him): “The world doesn’t revolve around you, darling.”

Yes.

I’d thrown in the “darling.”

Remy: “Bullshit, Wyn. Has it occurred to you that we might not be together, but we’re still a family?”

Me: “I haven’t *disowned* our children. I’ve *changed my name*. And frankly, what my name is, is no longer any of your business.”

Remy: “You dumping my name and our history and every memory we’ve ever made is none of my business?”

Seriously?

And *he* called *me* “prone to drama” (which he had, numerous times)?

Me (at the same time trying not to let my head explode): “I wasn’t the one who walked out on *you*, and I wasn’t the one who filed divorce from *you*. You want to talk about a memory, Remy? Let’s talk about *that* one.”

For those scores, it was a stalemate on my house reno (only because he still thought he was right; I still knew it was none of his business).

But I'd sure won that last one.

I knew this because it'd bought me three whole Remy-free weeks while he seethed.

And damn it all to hell, while he did that, I'd missed him.

These were my thoughts as I walked from my car to his house, which was set deep into a big lot on a curve in a street in the historic neighborhood of Encanto.

Ranch-style. L-shaped. With lush, tropical landscaping that was so old and established, it was a beautiful, cultivated jungle. This surrounding a small front courtyard with a fountain that you could see through the wall of windows that made up the front of the house.

Although I'd been there several times, I had never been given a full tour, but I knew to one side Remy had a home office and Sabre had a bedroom, which should be the guest suite, but it was a private young-adult-man space now (another reason Sabre stayed with Remy).

Down the longer side, the end of which was Remy and Myrna's master suite that had a sunken bed area I had a secret longing to see, there were also Jack and Jill bedrooms for Yves and Manon, and a poker room.

Yes, a room dedicated to freaking *poker*.

Because Remy was that guy.

The man's man.

He did not sit and watch football on Sundays because those were the days he played rugby. And after he played rugby, he drank beer and ate steak with his rugby buddies. He'd had a spell where he'd been a triathlete, and he'd moved on from this to dedicate time to snowboarding (something he already did, and he still did it) and mountain bike riding (and luckily for him, we lived in Arizona, so he could do that year-round).

Obviously, he played poker the entire time I knew him.

He was further an ace at pool (and had a pool table in his family room, a room that also had a wet bar, not kidding, *a wet bar*).

His house included a somewhat formal sunken living room, which was what you walked into from the front door.

This room had a grand piano (Remy and all the kids played because his mother decreed that "gentlemen understand the finer arts by *participating in them, cher*") and two walls of windows.

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One that looked to the front courtyard.

One that looked to a backyard, which showcased a rectangular mid-century pool and patio replete with perfectly placed barrel cacti, boxy furniture with bright turquoise cushions, and shade provided by specially designed “umbrellas” made of turquoise fabric stretched between three wide and tight white circles attached at an angle to a white pole, and they looked like they belonged in Tomorrowland.

In other words, they were fabulous.

Remy’s house further included a one-lane kitchen that managed to have a remarkable amount of counterspace because it was so long. It also had excellent and unexpected lighting, and cabinets suspended by short rods over the outside counter that faced the pool-table-wet-bar-bedecked family room. Milky, sliding glass panels covered the fronts of the overhead cabinets. Minimalistic handles on the lower. Stainless steel appliances that, I noted every time I was there, were miraculously fingerprint free.

It really was magnificent.

The whole home.

Or at least what I’d seen.

And luckily for Remy, he’d found a woman who would move into his massive, four-thousand-square-foot mancave and not change a thing.

Not put her stamp or personality on an inch of it (at least, any of it I’d seen).

Except, of course, the framed nude photograph of herself she’d given Remy for Christmas last year.

In front of my children.

I had to hand it to Remy. By Manon’s report, although this portrait hung in their bedroom, he’d not been best pleased, and he hadn’t hidden it when he’d received something so personal without warning in front of his kids (her excuse, also according to Manon, “But, baby, they’re *all grown,*” and no, the woman had no children of her own, which might explain that).

But it was on display in his house where his children lived.

Perhaps not in the living room...but still.

“I never go into their room because...gross,” Manon had said about it.

This had genuinely made me sad.

Because Remy and Manon used to cuddle up in our bed all the time, watching romcoms (they were both suckers for a good romcom, or a bad one) or reading (they were big readers and we hadn't had any furniture where dad and daughter could snuggle and lose themselves in books, except our big bed).

One could say, if you wanted to stake your territory in your man's house that you had to share with his kids, that was a good way to do it.

And that was how I took it.

With all things *Remy!* spilling all over his home, including his kids being there a lot of the time, Myrna had to stake her claim somewhere.

So she did.

But honestly, though I'd never utter these words out loud to anyone (not even Kara and Bernice, definitely not Bea), I would be happy in that house.

Absolutely, my huge kitchen with its acres of marble countertops (Remy's reno, almost upon us moving in, in fact our entire house had been reno'ed and decorated by him—not a surprise, since projects he worked on now, he designed everything from the building to the furniture and carpeting) and my new master suite that was most women's dream, would be hard to walk away from.

But his house was just that awesome.

And if that was what he'd wanted (and I knew it was, he'd talked about it often enough), once the kids were all gone or close to it (say, *now*) I would have given it to him.

Which would cue Bea getting in my face about it, like she did anytime I "gave into" Remy.

This was all on my mind as I walked from my car to his front door and pressed the button for the doorbell.

It wasn't a surprise when he opened it almost immediately.

And he did it with a face like thunder (again, no surprise).

Still, that face was unbelievable.

He was ridiculously attractive, had been when we met, and was even more so now.

Tall (six foot three). Built solid and bulky with thighs that could spawn their own religion. He had messy, dark, always overlong hair that now had threads of silver in it, and classic French male features. Strong, distinctive nose. Heavy brow. Thick eyebrows. Wide forehead. Perfectly

formed mouth that had a tendency to rest in a delicious male pout or a distressingly outstanding smirk.

He was, as I stared up at him glowering down at me, cool.

That was Remy.

Cool.

Effortlessly so.

He was who Hugh Hefner wanted to be, standing there in his fabulous doorway with his distinctive home behind him wearing a pair of jeans that were soft as velvet (I knew because I'd washed them) and faded almost white. They hung loose but hinted at a superior ass (the hint was true) and could bunch in mysterious, delicious ways around a promising package (and it lived up to that promise).

Up top, a pale-yellow button-up shirt that opened to give a generous visual of a strong, tanned column of throat and the cut of his muscled collarbone and hung off his shoulders in a casual, "I don't give a shit" way that was so attractive, you could taste it on your tongue.

His feet were bare, the front hems of his jeans draped over his ankles, and the back hems were raw ends because he'd been walking on them for years.

He was top-to-toe beautiful.

And he was no longer mine.

"You're late," he bit, his rich voice edged with barbs, like molasses tinged with serrano. "No fuckin' surprise."

"I'm sorry," I replied. "I am. Yes. I've no excuse. But I truly am sorry."

His head ticked with surprise at my response because I was always late, and I always had an excuse, and at our end, this always bugged him, the being-late part, *and* the excuse part.

Then his eyes narrowed.

"Have you been crying?"

Guess I should have allotted another minute to fixing my makeup.

"I'm good. I'm fine. I'm here. I really am sorry that—"

"Why have you been crying?"

There was no use denying I had. First, I couldn't really hide it. Second, I knew this man, every inch of his body, every mood he could have, every expression that could pass over his face, all of it like the back of my hand.

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He knew me the same.

So there was no point.

I locked eyes with him and said, “Honestly, Remy, I’m okay. But Sabre probably—”

“Why have you been crying, Wyn?”

“It really isn’t that big of a deal.”

Lie: I’m crying because I finally came to terms with the fact that we’re over.

“I’m good. Honestly.”

Lie: You were the love of my life and I let us fail.

“I’m okay now. Let’s do this with Sabre.”

Lie: I wasn’t. But I was determined I would be. Eventually.

He didn’t move out of the door to let me in.

“Remy—” I started.

“Why have you been crying, Wyn?”

It was an unexpected blow, but man, did it sock me right in the chest.

I drew in breath to recover from the warm concern in his tone, the soft worry on his face, the intense scrutiny of those caramel eyes.

I opened my mouth, and I had no idea what was about to come out, particularly since his gaze dropped to my lips, and I felt that familiar, lovely heat hit other parts of me when it did, before a call came from inside the house.

“Is it Wyn?”

Myrna.

I swallowed, closed my eyes, dropped my head, shifted my chin to the side and gave it a second before I opened my eyes and looked at Remy again.

Mistake.

Huge.

Because I just did all of that. And he’d just watched me do it.

Another expression was on his face now, and apparently, I’d lied before.

Because he was studying me in a way he never had.

Though the warmth and concern were not gone.

“Come in,” he murmured, finally stepping out of the way.

I tucked my clutch closer under my arm and stepped my Louboutin-shod foot over the threshold.

One thing my profession had insured I had not lost the ability to do: walk around in four-inch heels like they were sneakers.

And this was the only thing I had going for me when I looked down into the sunken living room and saw my children not there, so I moved right, toward the kitchen and family room that sat in the point of the L of the house to see my kids lounging there.

And to be confronted with Myrna in the kitchen.

Remy was six-three. Sabre was six-four. Yves was his dad's exact height. Manon was five-eight.

I was five-nine.

Myrna was at most, five-four, probably more like five-three.

I knew everything about clothes, shoes, handbags, makeup and accessories, and every designer in the world (not exaggerating) sent me freebies. For my clients. And for me.

And I used them.

All the time.

Myrna was a granola, boho, throw-on-some-mascara (maybe), pick-up-your-multi-colored-woven-fringed-crossbody-and-go desert rat.

She mountain biked with Remy.

My ass had tried a spin class once and I detested it, so that had never happened again. But the kids had bought me a pink Schwinn with a cute basket, which I occasionally rode to the grocery store or a coffee shop, and by "occasionally," I meant this happened maybe five times a year.

I was blonde, my hair ranging from shades of gold to butterscotch (not really, I had no idea what my natural hair color was anymore, and I didn't allow myself to come even close to finding out, and I never would, *until the day I died*).

She was a brunette, her long, wild, perfectly tousled hair falling near to her waist when it wasn't wrapped in some slapdash knot or twisted into twin braids.

Mine went to my bra-strap and I had it professionally blown out once a week, the other two times I did it myself, and I was (almost) a master.

She was busty, but otherwise thin.

I had tits and ass for days, never in my life had I had a flat stomach, and right then was no exception.

I was (if pushed to define it at all, never my favorite thing to do) what I preferred to consider “seasoned.”

She was thirteen years younger than me.

At that moment, she was in cutoff shorts, a slouchy mustard-colored three-quarter-sleeve top that had some kind of metallic bits sewn in and some tassels dangling. Worn Birkenstocks were on her feet and a scarf thing was happening in her hair. Her exposed limbs were tanned.

I was in green houndstooth, wide-legged pants, a severe black blouse buttoned up to my neck, red suede pumps with a thin ankle strap, and sun had not touched my skin unless it was carefully sunblocked since Remy and I moved from New York to Phoenix so he could take the job in a cutting-edge firm that had handpicked him from college.

“Mom, you think you could not be late sometime in one of the millennia you’ve lived in?” Sabre asked.

And I hoped it went without saying that I loved my son more than breath.

But his saying that in that moment when I was facing off with Myrna hurt.

Badly.

I tore my eyes from her and looked to him.

He was not the spitting image of his dad. He got my eyes and there was a lot that was all Sabre. But he got his dad’s body and mouth.

He was also looking beyond me, to who I assumed was his father, and Sabre might not be hanging his head, but he was close to it. Thus, I assumed Remy was giving him a look that shared how he felt about the millennia comment.

Yes, Remy could shout in my face, but he did not (ever) allow any of our children to disrespect their mother.

My gaze moved to Manon, who had Remy’s coloring, my skin, and some of my features, the rest was all her.

It was Yves who looked most like one of his parents, that parent being his father. Yves moved like Remy, with that big cat’s prowl. They even had a similar sounding deep, rich voice.

And they were all hanging about the family room like it was their home.

Which it was.

“I’m sorry. No excuses. Something happened, I should have ignored it, and didn’t and—” I started.

I didn’t finish because Yves interrupted me, wearing the same exact expression his father had only moments before while his eyes moved over my face.

“You all right?” he asked.

“I’m fine, honey.”

“Wyn is here.”

I twisted at the waist and looked back at Remy, who said these words.

And from where his attention was focused, I saw he said them to Myrna.

I just didn’t know why he said them since I was there, the woman could see, we’d both stared at each other not a minute ago, so my arrival didn’t need to be announced.

“Yes, sorry,” I put in, attempting to interpret what was going on with him and rectifying what I thought he was noting was my mistake. “Hello, Myrna.”

“Wyn,” she pushed out like she’d done it after sucking a lemon.

“Wyn is here,” Remy repeated.

My gaze went back to him.

His face was bland.

Oh boy.

Trouble was definitely flirting with paradise.

“Remy—” Myrna started.

“What’d I say?” he asked like he really didn’t care if she remembered, but regardless, what she was not doing that he wanted her to do, she needed to do it...*immediately*.

Yikes!

Trying not to call attention to myself, I walked into the family room thinking at least I’d never had *that* Remy.

I’d seen that Remy, when he was around people he did not care for, they annoyed him or frustrated him, or were simply of an ilk he didn’t have any fucks to give them.

His deep freeze was chilly, believe you me.

But his bland indifference seemed worse.

I used to tease him about both.

For my part, I might get the deep freeze on the most intense of our occasions.

Predominantly, though, I got the hothead, shout-the-roof-down, never-say-die, duke-it-out-verbally until someone either slammed out of the room or you attacked each other and fucked it out.

I had honestly thought it was all going to be okay when I got back from California those three years ago because, before I went, we'd gone at it but ended fucking it out.

But when I came home, he'd been packing.

And he'd already had a furnished apartment to go to. So even before that, he'd been planning.

So I'd obviously been wrong.

"She can stay, Dad," Sabre put in.

Remy cut his eyes to his son, and I was about to hug Yves, but I went still and stiff, like I had to be prepared to throw myself between them to protect my boy with the way Remy did it.

Sabre clamped his mouth shut.

I didn't hug Yves, or Manon, and definitely not Sabre, as I watched with perhaps inappropriate fascination as Remy turned back to Myrna and lifted his brows.

My gaze shifted to her, and I saw her face get red with embarrassment, anger or hurt, I had no idea.

Though it was probably all three that made her stomp loudly in her Birks toward Remy, grab her multi-colored woven crossbody (I wasn't lying) from the counter, then turn and stomp the other direction to the door to the garage where her old pickup rested beside Remy's Tesla.

She slammed the door behind her.

She did not say goodbye.

"Can we do this?" Yves asked impatiently, but there was a pitch to his voice that had me belatedly studying him closely.

He was ill-at-ease, for certain.

I read this as the fact he knew what this was about.

And I was seeing with the way my youngest was being, and also taking in the demeanor of my middle, not to mention my eldest, that my thought processes needed to shift to dealing with something like Sabre having gotten some girl pregnant and now, I not only had to get over being a divorcée, I had to come to terms with becoming a grandmother.

We were a touchy, affectionate family. We'd started that way because of me (Remy's mother was an overbearing, snobbish, horrendous Southern woman—the exact opposite of every single

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Southerner I'd ever met—and his French father was largely absent, and when he wasn't, he was indulgent of his wife, so we could say hugs weren't *de rigueur* in the Gastineau household). And our open affection had never died.

But so this could get started, then be over for my son, I didn't do the physical greetings I usually would.

I took a seat in an upholstered armchair with a low, double-buttoned back and short legs, and tucked my clutch in my lap.

Once down, I watched, morbidly enthralled, as my kids sat one-two-three on Remy's couch, with Yves sandwiched in the middle.

Yes, Yves.

Not Sabre.

Yves.

What was going on?

Remy strolled in, cutting across the room with long-legged purpose, coming to my chair.

I thought he'd stand beside it, since there was no other furniture he could sit on around me. The matching armchair to the one I was in was at the opposite side.

But no.

I watched with lips parted as he parked his ass on the *arm of my chair*.

The.

Arm.

Of.

My chair.

Like he did back in the day.

Like he did and I loved him to do. Complete with leaning back, resting a hand in the top of the chair, close to me, my protector, his long bulk ready to spring forward on attack or to defend should some rabid dog suddenly enter the room, or someone came close to landing a drop of martini on me.

He was studying our children while I had my head tipped back studying him.

And since he continued studying our children, slowly, I turned their way to see Sabre scowling at his father, Yves looking fidgety and not focused on much of anything, and Manon staring at me.

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The second I caught my daughter's eyes, she mouthed, "*What...is...happening?*"

She meant her dad and the chair.

I wished I knew.

But it would take a while to find out.

Because right then, the evening took two sharp and exceptionally unexpected turns.

And not a member of our family was going to be the same after them.

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