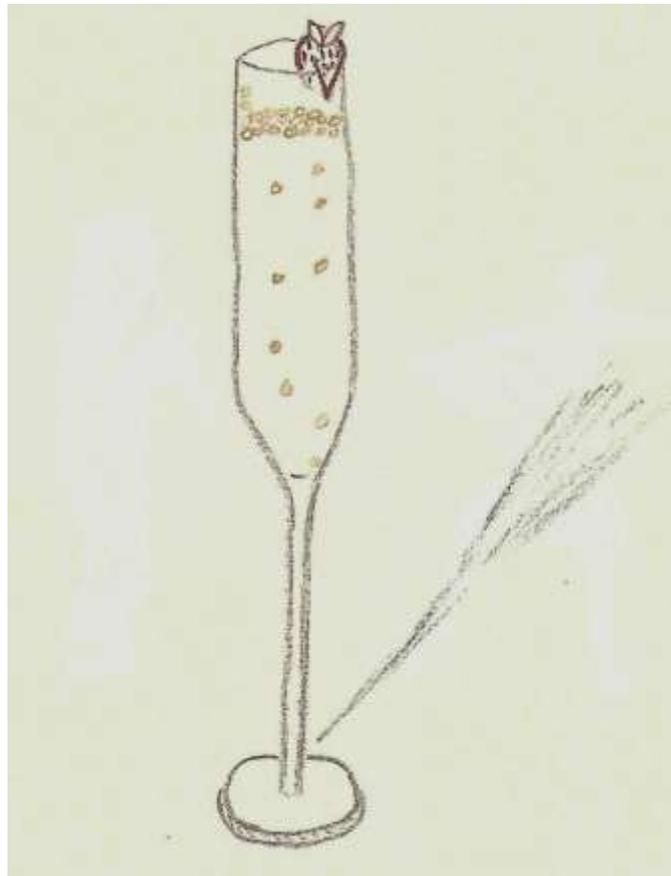




Seamstress Mend My Broken Heart

Yael and Phineas meet under the strangest of circumstances. After this meeting, Yael's life not only begins to change, but it ebbs and waves. In fact, her life begins to transform completely. With all of these changes, love is the last thing she thinks she will find.



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Yael wakes up slowly, her head is pounding, her body is feeling a bit achy and her mind is in kind of a fog. She opens one eye at a time and looks around her room. Something looks different about the room, but she can’t seem to place what it might be. She remembers checking into a hotel yesterday and being in a rush, but for the life of her, she can’t seem to figure out why or where. She sits up slowly because her body doesn’t want to move too quickly and her head is feeling like she has one doozy of a hangover, only she doesn’t remember drinking any alcohol. She is usually very careful about things like that. Especially in public.

Blinking her eyes a few times as she moves to a sitting position, she suddenly stops as she sees one very tall, very good looking, man laying across a chair in front of her bed. Yael looks down at herself and sees that she is still in her dress from last night. She reluctantly pulls the covers back, and to her relief, she does not see any blood stain nor does she feel any pain in places that should remain private. This is a good sign, but who is this man and why is he in her room? Is this her room? Oh no, is it?

Hearing a gasping sound, he pushes himself awake to see that his guest is fully awake right now and staring at him as he expected her too, in shock. “Good morning. I take it you are feeling better than last night. Allow me to introduce myself to you. I’m going to reach into my pocket, pulling out a driver’s license, ok?” He tells her and then pulls out his wallet to get his license, he tosses it to the bed along with his badge from last night’s banquet.

Yael looks at the license and back at the man sitting there, now she looks at the badge. It says he is a guest at the Annual Book Lovers Banquet. Banquet? Book Lovers? She questions herself. It looks familiar but her head is still not totally in focus. It will come to her soon, she is sure of it.

“You may still be foggy from the medication I had to give you last night. Quite a reaction you had there,” he says.

“Reaction?” she questions

“Tell me, what kind of food do you have such a violent allergic reaction to, and why don’t you try to avoid it more diligently?” he asks probably in more of a condescending way than he intended.

“I’m deathly allergic to strawberries is all, a weird allergy, but all mine. Nothing else affects me so strongly. They are easy to avoid,” she says defensively.

“Really? So why did you have a glass of champagne in your hand?” he asks. “There were punch bowls all over the place filled with strawberries on the bottom of them. The champagne was pink from them being there, easy to see,” he says.

“Let me get this straight, you’re a doctor, I see that from your license and your admittance card but I don’t drink or eat anything with strawberries, that makes no sense. Why would I put myself through this? Did I need my epinephrine?” she asks, now feeling her leg for the sore it usually leaves.

“No, I had a different type of medicine to give you, I didn’t know you had one in your purse until afterwards. I carry something else, the only problem is that one of the side effects usually knocks the person out like a strong sleeping drug which helps with the healing. The

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medicine is a relatively new item on the market. Apparently, you were to receive some sort of award last night, give a speech even?” he says questionably trying to jog her memories.

“Oh, my word! My speech!! The award, of course.” She slaps her own forehead. “I should call my boss, let him know why I wasn’t there. Oh, damn it! I probably don’t even have a boss anymore.” She slumps down a bit now. “Do you know where my phone is? Maybe I should check for messages.”

“I know where it is and you have no worries about your boss. He knows what happened to you. The important question is, do you?” he asks again.

“I remember rushing into the hotel, I was running late because of some stupid thing that crashed at work. Someone sabotaged a file of mine and I had to clean it up immediately. I have a feeling I know who made that mess but I can’t prove it. Anyway, I ran in and checked into our room, company paid so a co-worker decided to share with me without asking first. Whatever, I was planning on leaving my office anyway but I wanted to do this with his blessing not the boss’s curse. That aside, I ran in, she stalled me even more by deciding to open a bag of mine then I noticed the time and had to run downstairs to greet people last night I immediately needed to put on my professional face because the lobby was full of attendees already.

Yeah, I remember now. I came in, I saw a few clients from the past. I saw a few men who are in the illustration department like me and went over to speak with them. One of them is far superior to me in his management skills and I wanted to talk to him before I surprised him with my speech.

Ok, head is clearing more now, here is the back story, my boss told me he nominated me for this award and I told him it wasn’t fair of him to do that because he already knew I was leaving the industry to pursue a different career with my design sense. I had already been offered a job and it starts in three weeks but I wanted to take time in between jobs to resettle myself. That being said, he told me that he still thinks I deserve the award and with awards come promotions, it’s how things work in his office. I had to tell him that the promotion takes me out of the design work and puts me more into the management area which I am not so qualified to do but that Barrington is a much better person for a position like that.

Not thinking I had a chance to win, I forgot about it until I received the call that I would have to make a speech. I was floored, honored, but floored all the same. I went to my boss with a copy of my speech. In my speech, I thanked all the appropriate people who mentored me along the way. I also announced that I will be moving on, having achieved all that I came to achieve at this particular place with such a great mentor as my boss, and in my absence Barrington Wooly is going to take my place as the new manager of design for Covington Books. My boss agreed and said a public announcement would be a great way to acknowledge him without my boss having to get him some kind of award. He likes to say on our website that all management is award winning in their field and he hates to lie, so this public announcement would be good enough for him he said.

But I clearly didn’t make the speech last night, so who did?” she asks more to herself than to the man in front of her.

“I believe I can answer that,” he says laughing.

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“What is so funny?” she asks defensively.

“Since I now know so much about you, let me introduce myself formally, I came in town three days ago, I’m here for a medical convention in my area of expertise, dermatology, but that is not important right now. I have a friend who is a book junkie, he has a larger personal library than some schools do. I convinced him to start donating his books. He did, he donated half of them to the Institute of Higher Education here on 95th street,” he says taking a breath.

“Your friend is Jack Marlow?” she asks.

“You know him?” he asks.

“Of him, I am the one he worked through to accomplish all the paperwork necessary to get the donation done officially so he can get all the tax benefits he is supposed to get. He was to receive a large accommodation last night as well,” she says.

“Yes, hence the reason he asked me to come in a day early so that I can watch him embarrass himself. You see, he hates speaking in public which is why he works online only. Doesn’t really get out to places where he has to make presentations. He will only let his work speak for him. He sends presentations to people, doesn’t verbalize them. Stage fright since we were kids,” he says.

“You’re a brother to Dr. Marlow?” she asks.

“Old friend since we were about fourteen years old. Didn’t you notice the last name before you handed me back my license? Anyway, would you like to hear what happened?” he asks.

“No, I only looked at your face to see if it matches both the badge and your license. Probably not so smart, but I’m not totally thinking clearly yet. I’d sure love to hear what happened last night though,” she says swallowing hard.

“Mouth dry? Here, let me order some breakfast to be sent up. You didn’t eat dinner last night, and who knows when the last time you drank is. No arguing I’m ordering what you need. I’m a doctor.” He smiles and walks over to the computer screen on the wall and places an order with room service then he turns around to her and walks back to sit in the chair in front of her bed.

“As we came in last night there you were, standing in the middle of a large group of guys. Ring a bell?” he asks.

“Ah, yes, I said that I was talking to Barrington then, and some of our fellow illustrators from different companies. Not many women in the field yet,” she says.

“Ok, that makes sense that there were only two of you then,” he says.

“Two?” she asks.

“Yes, there was a very tall gal who came into the group and handed you a drink, you were clearly too distracted by the conversation to ask what it was and probably starved for something to eat or drink that you took one large drink. Then you were on the floor. Thankfully, I was right there with you. Your reaction was quick and severe. I always carry something with me, having grown up with a sister who had reactions like that to various things, you never know when you will need it, and as a doctor I don’t need a reason to carry one.

That aside, I had pushed myself in the group and administered the medication orally. You swallowed it with ease as most people do. I asked the woman who handed you the drink what it was, she told me champagne. I asked her if she knows if you were allergic to it and she smiled and



said, ‘who is allergic to champagne?’ then she went on and on about how it was a pity and that you had a speech to make tonight. Your boss came running over, having heard a commotion. He saw you on the floor and asked what happened. I told him you had a reaction to something. He said that it wasn’t possible because you are always so careful. Someone in the crowd agreed with him, saying you are always diligent but no one said what the allergen was. If they did, I could have cornered her in that I saw her give it to you with that knowledge. But now all of that information is he said, she said.” He looks at his patient now to see how she takes the information.

“That bitch!! Tall, dark hair, lips colored with purple lipstick and a belt the same color purple to coordinate her best features.” She gags as she quotes the woman he is talking about.

“Very well done,” he laughs, “However, you are the one who got the last laugh.”

“How can that be if I’ve been passed out all night here with you?” she assumes. “I have been passed out right?”

“Yes, with me. I’ve been watching that things don’t get worse. We called the hotel personnel and they actually keep an emergency stretcher here, so we lifted you up and put you on top. I told them I’d watch over you, your boss seemed to like the idea that I wasn’t going to let you simply sleep the reaction off. Then he said out loud that you were to say a speech. That woman reached over to the floor where your purse was and told everyone that she would do this favor for you, as your good friend,” he tells Yael.

“What? How can she accept something that is not hers and then say what I had to say?” she asks shaking her head in disbelief.

“This is where karma comes in. Your boss, knowing what the speech said, agreed to let her read and she seemed quite pleased with herself. Your boss, remember, knew what was in the speech. Sorry, I said that already. The other man, Barrington? He wanted to come up with you, said he didn’t trust me. I gave him a key to the room and told him he can come up any time he wanted to. He never did by the way, at least, I never heard him. Anyway, my friend introduced himself to your boss, he needed some sort of moral support to accept his plaque and your boss and Barrington agreed to sit with him. Jack sent the video of her reading your speech. You up to seeing some entertainment now?” he asks.

There is a knock on the door and he sets his phone down on the bed and walks over to open the door for the bellboy to set up the room service he ordered. He hadn’t eaten dinner yesterday either but he didn’t want to tell her that.

Yael watches as the young man sets up the table with four different trays and dishes, glasses for juice and mugs for coffee. “Will there be anything else sir?” he asks the doctor.

“No, thank you,” he says and walks him out. “Would you like to watch the video first or go get washed up and have breakfast. Your body needs the nourishment, doctor’s orders,” he smiles again. Looking at her all night brought smiles to his face, now at least she can see them.

“I suppose a shower sounds nice but my clothes are in my room not yours. I can go get them and come back and join you for breakfast,” Yael says wanting to leave.

“Or you can simply look to your left and see your suitcase has been brought in here. I’m sorry I needed to see if you had any medications. My apologies,” he says.



“Um, I guess that makes sense under the circumstances. How about I simply brush my teeth, that smells good and my stomach is growling. We’ll eat, then I’ll shower,” she says.

“Good idea,” he says.

Yael gets out of bed and grabs her toiletry bag to go brush her teeth and wash off her make-up from last night.

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Phineas sends a message to his friend Jack. *‘She finally woke up, hell of a night but I’ll never tell her that. Thanks for the video, best part of the evening. How did your own speech go?’* he asks.

‘Too damn early in the morning for this, speech went well. Evening spent with Barrington even better. We really hit it off. Seeing him for dinner tonight, sorry.’ Send

‘All the better then. Glad you enjoyed. How did he take the new job announcement?’ the good doctor asks.

‘Shocked as all hell. He went over to his boss to confirm, and when the man said yes, the whole table cheered. Great people. He spoke a lot about Yael, she sounds like a keeper, try not to scare her off too much with medical talk.’ Send

‘Oh, very funny. I ordered breakfast, starved, after lunch I’ll propose or is that too fast?’ Phineas laughs at his own text.

“Something funny come in so early in the morning?” Yael asks. That’s the second person who mentioned the time, Phineas looks at his watch, only 5:00 in the morning. No wonder. *‘Hey sorry about time. We’ll catch up tomorrow’* he sends to his friend.

‘☺’ is what he gets back.

“Let me go brush my teeth now, please start before the food gets cold,” he says.

Yael looks in her purse for her phone, she sends a text to Barrington, *‘Just letting you know I’m alive and well. Sorry I ruined things for you last night.’*

‘Ruined! Holy moly Yael I think I met the man of my dreams. The doctor’s friend? Wow! We hit it off almost immediately and we’re going out tonight for dinner. I hardly slept, I’ve been so excited. Oh, glad you’re ok though. I did go up and check. I left the key on the table by the bed. I saw you two both sleeping, he on the chair and you in the bed. He is a great guy. Hell of a way to meet though.’ He writes back smiling. Manager! Him. He is going to be manager and everyone was so excited for him. Well, everyone except that bitch, but no one cares about her anyway. Not even the boss. She publicly humiliated herself last night and it was so fun to watch.

‘Ummm, you’re welcome. I suppose. Let me know how dinner goes. I want ALL the details. So proud of you. Love you.’ Yael writes smiling.

She walks back over to where the food is and begins to serve herself. “Hmmm, muffin, eggs, toast, fruit, what to choose first?” she says out loud.

“Eggs, the rest is all cold anyway,” the doctor laughs. She looks up as he sits down and she reaches out her hand to shake his, “Yael,” she says as a way of introduction.

“Phineas,” he says shaking her hand and then serves her some food. “Please drink up,” he says as he pours her some juice.



The two strangers eat in peace. After about fifteen minutes, Yael says. “Ok, I’m ready to see that video now,” she says.

Phineas takes out his phone and watches again, this time with her. She watches as her former colleague reads from her speech first announcing who she is and who she is to Yael, which is completely over stated. Then she reads on and as Yael finished writing about all of her mentors, the woman continues by adding herself in and saying how grateful she is for this woman in her life. Yael looks to Phineas, “you know that part is garbage, right?” she asks.

“Keep watching.”

Yael watches as the woman gets to the part of accepting the award but then continues to read how she is grateful for a different opportunity and that she is turning over her promotion to someone who is more qualified to handle such an honored responsibility. She reads Barrington’s name and then loses her self-control right there on the podium. She starts ranting about how Barrington is not qualified and how he steals work from her all the time and turns it in as his own. Her rant lasts longer than Yael’s original speech. Finally, one of the coordinators of the event leads her off stage.

“Why did they let her go on? That could have been prevented you know,” she says a bit dismayed.

“No, she would have made a bigger spectacle. Now, everyone in the industry she claims to be so proficient in, was there to see her. Who is going to hire her now? She nailed the lid into her own coffin with that rant. How many people did she *not* exclude?” he asks smiling

Yael hears her phone chime. “Hold that thought,” she says. She picks up her phone and sees she missed a dozen messages from last night. She scans them quickly, most of which wished her well but then said they were thankful that she wasn’t there to witness what happened. The newest one is actually from the woman herself. She reads this one out loud, “*You and your stupid allergy. You’ve ruined my life. How dare you humiliate me in public last night and in front of all the important people in our industry. You mark my words, you are going to pay for this both professionally and personally. I know where you live, watch what you drink in the future.*”

“That sounds like an admission, as well as a threat Yael. You’d best be turning this over to the police,” he says with concern.

“Police? Naw, this will blow over,” she says

“Yael. No, this won’t. She is out for vengeance and she has to justify herself by ruining you. She has to save her own face and you are her new nemeses. Please, call your lawyer at least. Or send the message to him or her.” he says in a pleading voice.

“You’re serious, aren’t you?” she asks nervously.

“Anybody who would purposely give you something she knows you can’t have, and then try and turn herself into your biggest mentor? Yes, I would take the message as a real threat. Allow me.” He takes her phone, he begins to write and say out loud at the same time “That sounds like a threat to my life. I believe I will have to send this message to my lawyer and possibly the police.” Phineas looks at Yael and she nods, he hits send.

Yael takes another bite of her muffin. “Why?” she whispers to herself really and shakes her head back and forth.



“Jealous?” he asks.

“Of me? Ha! That’s a good one. I always took my art seriously. I do my projects with a full heart, and that is why those books that I have worked on, the authors liked, because I took what was in their mind and presented those thoughts in pictorial form when all they had were words. People tell me I captured their ideas. I had fun, I will probably always continue to have fun with art, but I want to do something else to show my creative skills off. I’ve been taking a lot of courses on sewing and designing clothing in the past couple of years. I’ve sold a few ideas to people and have made some decent money in doing so. I have designed some patterns for materials as well. It’s a new way to use my creativity and I’ve really been enjoying what I’m able to come up with.

My boss is great, I showed him the contract I received about selling something and he had his legal department look over the whole thing to make sure I wasn’t getting screwed. He said I am allowed to use them as long as I continue to promote his company on my personal website. How can I say no to that? I’ve been with them for ten years now. But I want something else. Does that make me as ungrateful as she says? Maybe it does, maybe I shouldn’t be so flip about a promotion,” she hangs her head down.

“Maybe you shouldn’t be so hard on yourself either,” Phineas says. Yael looks up questioning his statement. “Come on, it is easy to get caught up in a place that loves you and never leave but comradery doesn’t fulfill your inner creativity. It fulfills your desire to make people happy. But I have a feeling you can do that in any job you take and I’ve only known you a couple of hours. Yael, if you have legal on your side, send them the text. Let them tell you what to do. She is still on payroll there I assume, and as of the dinner you were too,” he suggests.

“Good point, ok.” She takes her phone back and forwards the texts to her boss and to the legal department.

“Am I ok to go to work today?” she asks.

“Probably not in that dress,” he smiles.

“I suppose not,” she smiles back, “I took a room here because I needed to meet with my potential new mentor this morning at 11:00 and there was no way I could be here late last night and wake early enough to get back here by 11:00 at least and be conscious, although that is debatable today anyway,” she says looking for confirmation.

“I’m sure you’ll be fine, you may not want to operate heavy machinery,” he laughs, “Hey, kidding, don’t looks so serious.”

“I have to drive to her. I suppose I can take a cab,” she says pondering the situation.

“I didn’t realize that. Ok, how about I drive you there. I have a car, I feel I owe you that much, it’s my fault you had those specific meds. The manufacturer recommends not to drive for twenty-four hours if you don’t have to. So, this is your transition from one job to a next? How far away do you live?” he asks. More for himself than anything else, he wants to know if he can actually make something work here on a personal level.

“Not too far but not close enough for things like this. I mean, ugh, I take the train in every day, only an hour and half. I love this job but I also love living in my parent’s home. The only item that is left for me since they left the country. They said they wanted to live their retirement years



not waiting to die in them. So, they left me the house and left the country. Who knows where they are at any given moment,” she says.

“Now that’s a retirement I’d love to do also. Something to plan for.” Trying to think of how the trains work near him he asks, “An hour and half north perhaps?” he asks hopeful.

“Yes, actually. I live in a town called Brice, after the founder of the mine that brought the people to the town in the first place,” she announces.

“On which side of the tracks?” he asks excitedly.

“Excuse me?” she says.

“Which side of the tracks? Jack and I grew up on the south side by Mallard Pond,” he says smiling to know she is around the corner from him.

“Oh, well. No, we couldn’t afford to live over there,” she says.

“Our area is not as rich as the reputation states. We only have one town pool, same as you. But we do have the better ice cream shoppe. Bradley’s is far better than Wilcow’s,” he says.

“Ok, I’ll give you that. But you also have that big country club that all the rich kids went to. The horse stables that they kept their horses at and the bigger cars, much bigger in price not necessarily in physical size,” she says.

“Rumors, all rumors. The country club catered to the people who lived in West Beach, the owners of the club found land on our side of the tracks to be cheaper than what they would have had to pay in West Beach, and being so close, they were able to attract the residents from there as well as those from Greenberg County. The locals? Naw, we never were part of the club unless we had summer jobs there. Jack did, not me. I was too big of a nerd to do outdoor jobs, I worked in medical offices throughout high school,” he says. “You don’t need to travel all this way to get trained by a good seamstress by the way. My aunt does the same thing only a twenty minute drive from our town,” he says.

“Did I tell you I wanted to be a seamstress? Thank you, but do you know how long it took for me to get in touch with this woman? I have to go see her, I don’t think she will accept any excuses. She is the best there is around here, I’m told,” she says, “Oh no, what will I do with my car now if I go with you? This is messed up and I don’t have time to think things through or the head.”

“First off, yes, you told me you were taking sewing classes. Here, allow me to think for you. First off, Jack can bring your car back tonight if you’d like, after his date with Barrington of course, I’m assuming you know about already,” he looks for confirmation and she smiles, “I trust him with my life, he will take good care of your car and be thrilled not to have to train it late at night. I’ll make you a bet. I’ll drive you to your appointment and see who this is for myself. If I’m not convinced she is the best, or even better than my aunt, then you have to meet my aunt. If I think she is the best for you, then I’ll buy you the most expensive sewing machine for you to start your business with.” He says, knowing full well his aunt trained half of the seamstresses in this city, many of which are full of egos because they work in the city and she doesn’t. Many think they passed her by.



“Sounds like a weird bet, but ok. I do have to shower though. Thank you for breakfast. I’m going to go get ready. I can’t believe we’ve talked for so long,” she says looking at her phone for the time.

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Yael takes her phone into the bathroom and turns on the water. She immediately sends a quick voice message to her brother Paul to let him know what’s been going on. He sends a response right away.

‘Sure, I know him. He works downstairs from me. Wow, what a story though. You sure you’re ok?’ he asks in a voice mail.

‘Yeah, weird part is, I’m still in his room and totally comfortable with this. Does that make me crazy?’ she asks.

‘Not really, it’s the small town in all of us, we’re a trusting bunch. Send me the video I’d love to see how she destroyed herself. Always hated that stuck on herself bitch, ever since high school. She always thought she was better than me in everything. I’ve got a patient. Send my best to Phineas and don’t worry about the house, I’m sending my mother in law over there to stand guard. No one gets past that pit bull, just ask her. Oh, and tell this Jack to leave his keys in Dad’s old spot you’ll find them in the morning.’ he laughs.

‘Thanks, I feel better now. Good idea about the key. Headed in the shower maybe we’ll stop by around dinner time.’ She finishes her last voice message and stares at the mirror, she whispers to herself, “Did I say we?” then she steps into the shower to wash away the last remnants of sleep. She looks at herself and sees that there are still some blotches of hives on her legs and a couple on her stomach. Wow that champagne really must have been saturated with strawberries. She thinks to herself.

Dr. Phineas, this is going to be a fun ride. She decides as she wraps the towel around herself to get dry. She takes her time to brush through her hair and put some lotion on. The knock at the door awakens her to her situation. “Yes?” she asks

“Um, you forgot your clothes, please don’t come out yet. I saw you take your toiletry bag in with you but no clothes. I’m assuming you’re used to coming out in a towel. I’m going to head downstairs because Jack called and needs to talk to me about something. I’ll bring him your keys if that’s ok. Don’t come out until you hear the door to the room close then come out and double lock the door immediately please. Don’t take chances. I’ll be back as soon as I can, and then we can go to your meeting. OK?” Phineas says.

Yael looks down at herself, she looks around the room. Wow, that is exactly what she was about to do, leave with only a towel on. With her cheeks blushing she says, “Thank you for the heads up. I’ll wait. Say hi from me and tell him Barrington is an amazing guy. Oh, and tell him when he drops off the key to slide it in the space between the front porch windows, my dad used to do that all the time,” she smiles, “Oh, and my address is on my suitcase.” She sighs and sits down on the toilet to wait now.

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"Will do." He walks over and opens the door and waits outside to hear her lock the door. He waits one minute, then two, finally he hears the chain being put on the door. Good, she listened, he thinks to himself.

Yael locks the door and turns around to look at the room. "Wow Dr. Phineas, you must be doing well because this room is twice the size as the one I had booked. Ok Yael let's get dressed for this interview, what did we bring?" she says out loud and walks over to her suitcase.

"Oh, damn, there is only one suitcase." She looks around the room. Under the bed, in the closet and then panic starts to set in. She quickly looks at her phone to see if she has Phineas's number. "Damn again," she says.

She dials Barrington to try and reach Phineas's friend to reach Phineas. "Whoa, ok, I've got this. Give me a minute I'll call him for you. What's the problem?" he asks.

"The material, my dress that I was bringing to the interview is all in my red small suitcase. Where is that?" she asks in a panic.

"Oh, no, Yael, when we went back to your room, the blue one was the only one there. I didn't look any further but I'll call him and call you back. Hold on," Barrington says.

Yael paces the room, it's not until her towel falls does she realize she is not dressed yet and she doesn't know when Phineas will be back. She scrambles to pick up the towel and get over to her suitcase and quickly throws clothes on. As she pulls on her shirt, her phone rings. "Hello? Did you find it?" she says panicked.

"No, did she know what was in your second suitcase?" Barrington asks slowly.

Yael slides down the wall to the floor, "Yes, I stupidly showed her. That's what made us run late last night, the fact that she wanted to see what was in there. It's a one of a kind couture dress. Would cost her over \$1000 or more to have something like that made. Now I can only show pictures to the woman I'm seeing. Oh, Barrington, how did I screw this up so badly?" she asks.

"Hey, didn't you say she is from your neighborhood? We'll simply get someone to go over to her house or apartment and take the suitcase back from her," he says.

"I'm guessing she isn't going to simply give up that dress. Pretty easy to say that I gave the whole thing to her as a gift. No one there would question that. My word against hers. Three weeks' worth of full-time hard work. Hours and hours of late nights. Idiot, idiot, idiot!" she screams as she hits her own forehead, hangs up the phone and pulls up her knees.

Phineas walks in with Jack and they see her on the floor. They approach slowly. "We didn't know any better. \$1000 really?" Jack says. "I know it doesn't bring back the garment but can I at least pay you for my mistake?" he asks.

Yael looks up at the two men. Phineas looks visibly crushed as does his friend. She believes this to be an honest offer. She picks up her phone and shows them the two pictures, front and back of the outfit on the woman who stole them. She insisted on trying it on.

Phineas looks to his friend and Jack looks back at him. He sits down with her and makes the picture bigger to see the detailing that was done on the dress. "My dear new friend. You can't possibly be new to this. I will gladly pay you \$1000, even more, if you'd do something like this for my sister's wedding in three months, can you do this in off-white and white combination? Can I send her this picture?" he asks sincerely.



“Really?” she asks.

“Oh honey, you have no idea what you’ve done, do you? This is exactly what she has been driving my mom crazy for. And Phineas’s aunt would make something herself but she is busy with a large order of her own right now. I don’t care what this woman here in the city is going to tell you. You belong on your own, not working for someone else. Hold on, that’s my sister calling back already.” He stands up and holds the phone away from his ear. Everyone hears her yelling in excitement. Jack watches Yael as tears come to her eyes.

She has never thought of herself as someone who can make a wedding dress. Weddings are so personal, so special to a woman and this woman doesn’t even know her. Jack gets off the phone and sits back down next to Yael, “So, things are settled then. You’ll go to this interview. You’ll tell her that you sold this one,” he holds up her phone “for \$1500 and that you have a buyer for a second one already as a wedding gown. Showing her that you’re not a beginner. Maybe that will help, or maybe Phineas here has better plans for you, but at least you won’t be walking in empty handed. Did you make the vest you’re wearing?” he asks.

Yael looks down, she doesn’t even know what she is wearing. She sees she is wearing her vest from yesterday, the one with the coffee stain on the left side and a nice skirt that was for today. “I’m a mess. But yes, I made this. I wear this one all the time. It’s comfortable. Even working at the computer all day, but I still wanted to look decent today though, you know what I mean?” she asks.

“I do, sorry I took her word when I asked if there was any more. No reason for me not to believe her, but, really, I didn’t even see a red suitcase. I think I would have noticed a red suitcase, I see it now, on the floor behind the woman wearing the dress.” Jack says.

“Not if she wanted what was inside you wouldn’t and you’d have no reason to look beyond her next to the bed. She knew that too. Damn bitch. I hope one of the sequence scratches her eyeball.” Yael says spitefully.

“ooo You’re a mean one. Remind me to stay on your good side,” Jack jokes.

“Ok Yael, we need to leave if we’re going to make the appointment on time. I gave Jack all your instructions. While you two have been having a little chat here, I packed us both up and signed out downstairs. Nice vest by the way.” Phineas says as he finally sees what she is wearing. Jack and Yael laugh.

“By the way, you know my brother Paul? He works upstairs from you he said.” Yael comments as she stands up and brushes herself off.

“Paul?” the two men say in unison. “As in pediatrician extraordinaire Paul?” Jack says.

“None other,” Yael says with pride.

“My nieces and nephews go to him. He is amazing. Gets the kids nice and calm before and after a shot or bad news of any kind. He was the doctor for the Krammer’s boy too wasn’t he?” Phineas asks.

“Yeah, that was tough on the whole neighborhood,” she says.

“True, I saw the boy twice for skin grafts. Makes my skin crawl what happened to him. But the bastard who did the damage was charged and convicted quickly. That has to be something, but



nothing will bring him back. Listen, I hate talking shop out of the office, especially when the news is bad, come, let’s get you to this appointment,” Phineas says.

The three new friends walk out of the hotel room and down into the lobby where they are met by Barrington. “I called her out on the suitcase,” he says as he walks with them to Phineas’s car.

“You what? Are you crazy or something?” Yael asks.

“Yes, but that is nothing new. I called and asked her straight out if she has your dress and her response to me was that she only has what was coming to her. Something about getting you the interview in the first place and that you owed her the dress as a finder’s fee,” Barrington says.

“Finder my ass. I pounded the pavement for months to get this appointment. Whatever, nothing will matter right now, it’s a formality because Phineas here seems to think I can do better than this woman and he has made me quite an interesting bet too,” she states. Jack begins to laugh.

“What is so damn funny?” she asks feeling as if she has become a butt of a joke. “You guys laugh at all the weirdest points”

“I’ll bet he says he wants to take you to his aunt,” Jack laughs some more.

“And what of it?” she says.

“Seriously?” Jack says looking at her for confirmation. He sees she is dead serious. “Oh, you really don’t know do you?” he asks.

“Know what? Come on we have to leave,” she says angrily now turning to Phineas.

Barrington leans down and kisses her cheek, he whispers in her ear as he pushes her into the car, “His last name is Levingston,” he smiles as he closes the door.

Yael stares out the window at Barrington and Jack, they are smiling back at her when the lightbulb goes on in her head. She turns to Phineas and says, “Your last name is Levingston?”

He laughs, waves to his friends, new and old and pulls out of his spot to drive her over to her appointment. “Aren’t you going to answer me?” she asks.

“Would it matter if I did?” he asks.

“Um, yes. It would have been a nice courtesy to mention this when you made your crazy bet. You aren’t going to like this woman at all are you? You knew that ahead of time. What if I don’t want to meet your aunt now?” she says with as much conviction as she can because meeting her would be the pinnacle of all meetings.

“I wanted you to trust me, not my name,” he says simply.

Yael thinks about this. He is right, and I made the commitment to the bet without knowing who his aunt is, now he thinks I’m going to beg for a meeting. Ugh, Yael why do you always blow the good parts of your life. She slumps down in her chair and lets him drive.

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The meeting goes worse than he expects. First off, he knows the woman and he can’t stand her, that doesn’t help matters. Apparently, she doesn’t like him either, or his aunt. “We aren’t here to discuss personal business. I believe your appointment is with Ms. Yael, not with me. I’m merely a driver,” he says.



“You’re a driver? Ha!! That will be the day. Ok, so now that I heard your sob story about why you’re so incompetent to lose your prized sample, show me the picture of this person wearing your supposed original design,” she says towards Yael but not really to her.

Yael opens her phone and shows her in detail the whole design, her handwork as well as the finished product on a person. “It has already been sold to someone else as a wedding dress, to be made with a combination of white and off-white instead of the purples and blues that it shows here,” she says trying to gain some self-confidence.

“Hard to tell what this really looks like from this small picture. Why don’t you email this to me so I can see the details on my big screen?” She says eyeing the picture. Phineas notices this and quickly takes the phone from her hand.

“No can do. Either you trust her about the quality or you don’t, but there will be no copying of work and claiming to be your own. That won’t work here,” he says firmly.

“You always were a little snot, still are, doesn’t matter that you have a doctor in front of your name. Go back to your little town where you came from Phineas and take this piece of trash with you,” she says smugly, “She’ll never amount to anything without me. Besides, I saw enough of that dress to make one of my own, and better,” she touts.

Yael does not take kindly to being called trash, nor does she take kindly to the fact that Phineas knew this woman was going to steal her idea and then not give her credit, and she didn’t even see that as a possibility, she is not sure who she is more angry with, him or herself. She looks around the room and turns to her left quickly, she ‘accidentally’ bumps into the dress mannequin and gives a slight tug to a string on the bottom. “oops, let’s go.” She says and continues to walk out. Phineas follows her quickly. As the door closes they hear the woman screaming.

“What did you do?” he asks.

“She clearly doesn’t put beads on well, they are all attached to the same string so if you pull ever so gently in a certain angle by accident the whole line of beads will magically fall off the dress. Innocent mistake, any amateur should know how to sew on beads better,” she says as they walk out of the building.

“She could have called you out on that,” he says, “And charged you with destroying property.”

“For what? I didn’t take anything, you both saw me twirl quickly after being insulted by her, like I said, innocent accident. She couldn’t prove a thing. Bad workmanship if you ask me. Who does that kind of work and charges so much? I mean, as a client, if I snagged something, she would charge me an arm and a leg to put all of the beads back together and then blame me for not treating her garment the way she thinks all garments should be treated. I would never do that. Now that I think about things, I *don’t* do that, and therefore, if she is charging those prices for that low of quality, then the dress I made is probably worth even more than I thought. Ugh, I can be such an idiot you know? Please, drop me off at the nearest train station. I’ll head home on my own. I always do. Besides, Paul has his mother in law watching over my house, I dare that bitch to even cross the sidewalk to the house. Scratch that, I almost hope she does.” She puts her hand over her mouth. What has gotten in to her? She is never so spiteful and vengeful.

“No,” he says simply.



“No? Excuse me? I need to go home. I have no more work here in the city as I have quit my job, and the meeting is over. You have a convention to stay for, please drop me off at the next station,” she says a bit louder this time.

“Um, nope,” he says smugly.

“You can’t kidnap me! I’ll jump out of the car. I could care less, it’s not as if you’re going very fast with all this traffic anyway.” She reaches for the handle of the door and his hand is across her and grabs her.

“Don’t do this. I’m driving you to my aunt, as I promised. Not tomorrow, not next year but now. She knows this woman, so do many. The woman you met with believes her ideas as well as her work are museum worthy, in my opinion her work is no greater than the average housewife who owns a machine. No offense to housewives,” he says.

Yael sits back a moment. “Then you and Jack really like the dress? That was a real offer from him?” she asks.

“I really like *you* actually. The dress is nice, yes, but this vest? This is something people will clamor for I can assure you. My aunt will get the vest bought by more than one company, then you will be set enough to make the dresses you really want to make. Like for Jack’s sister. Do you really think it will work with both white and off-white? Hey, wait a minute didn’t you say you have a job already in three weeks?” he asks mostly trying to take her worry away.

“I said that to my boss so he wouldn’t think I was a bigger idiot than I am by quitting one job before having another. In the right combination, whites can look beautiful together. I’d have to see her skin tone to know where to put which white. Stark white can’t be worn by very many people near the face actually, can make a person look sick. But an off-white under a white lace or even a pale pink under the white lace will look better on some people.” Yael continues to think out loud about making the wedding dress. There is so much potential to use this design, but can she do all the beading necessary in the three months Jack said she will have? Well, she doesn’t have a job, so maybe she can, and this time, she won’t have to work after hours and until the wee hours of the morning.

“Wow, once the creative juices start flowing, you don’t stop. Do you write things down?” Phineas asks.

“No, because when I write them down, I feel stuck, I will change my mind based on how the material feels in my hand and makes the client feel. A million things can change, from color to style to applications. What makes dress making so fascinating is all the options. Always changing,” she smiles.

“You’re going to love my aunt,” he says, “We’ll be there in about five minutes. Ready?” he asks knowing sometimes people get intimidated by her name and forget she is a person.

“No,” she says.

“Good,” he laughs and so does she.

Yael I’m going into your house to put up some dinner for you. I’m sure you won’t be eating today. As usual. Hope you don’t mind. MIL’



Yael gets out of the car and smiles, she writes back, ‘*Day has turned around completely, at least I hope so. Believe it or not I’m about to meet Mrs. Levingston, the famous seamstress and designer. Long story.*’ Send.

‘Don’t you be intimidated, and if she even says one word against you, I’m never buying her stuff again. You hear me? Now, if you have some clothes you want me to send pictures of, I’ll do that too while I’m here. By the way I left Major outside, I’m sure that bitch won’t come near the door when he barks even once. 😊’ send.

Before they walk in, Yael shows Phineas why she has been laughing at her phone.

“Who is M. I. L.?” he asks.

“Mother in law – she is my brother’s mother in law but took me under her wing. Really, this whole career change is because of her. I’ve made her a couple of things including the dress she wore to her own daughter’s wedding. Everyone loved how the dress fit her and she loved saying she had a one of a kind made solely for her,” she smiles and then looks down and rubs the vest again to try and get the stain out.

“Everyone spills, come on, you’re going to love her,” he says smiling.

“Phineas!! Oh, my word, I can’t believe you even went into her office. Is it still a mess? That woman could never keep her pins and needles separated, let alone material and buttons. Oh, darling how wonderful to see you again,” she hugs him more than once and kisses both cheeks.

“Well, with a reception like that, I think I’ll spend more days off visiting you instead of Jack,” he laughs.

“Oh, how is my Jack? Did he find anyone yet? He is so damn handsome, he needs a good one, solid soul that one,” she says with only eyes for Phineas, she hasn’t even noticed Yael standing there, now Yael is more nervous than ever.

“Auntie, I didn’t come for a social call, you know that. This is business, and this, this is Yael,” he says as a way of introduction. He had sent her a message about where he was going as soon as he found out from Yael.

She turns her head towards Yael. “Oh, my. Tell me you made that vest!” she squeals.

“Yes maám, I did. But it’s not much. Simply a comfortable piece to add on when you want to up the look a bit,” Yael says shyly.

“Take it off quickly, I have to look.” She practically grabs the vest out of Yael’s hands and runs to her machines and mannequins where there is better light. “Oh, Yael, honey. This is spectacular. The fabric moves well, good choice, color is neutral for most people, the beading is hand done, obviously.” She tries it on herself and bends from side to side and front to back. She reaches to the front and back and moves all around. “Fabulous! I love this piece already. What else?” she says looking around on the floor for a suitcase or a bag.

Phineas starts from the beginning and tells his aunt how they met, what happened to Yael and her dress and what happened at the meeting this morning already.

“Well, come, do you trust *me* enough to put the picture on my big screen?” she asks her nephew with a smile.

“With my life,” he says and takes Yael’s phone again and sends the picture to his aunt. Yael’s phone begins to buzz, and buzz and buzz. She looks down. Her MIL, so to speak, has sent



three more pictures of items from her closet that she has done. *‘I’ll send a pic of the wedding dress soon as my daughter sends me a good close up. Knock her socks off girly!!’*

Yael finds herself tearing up. This woman really does believe in her and didn’t only suggest a career move for fun. She really likes Yael and that means a lot from her MIL. She hands the phone to Phineas and shakes her head, he looks down and sees more pictures, he sends them to his aunt as well.

His aunt turns on three more screens across the table and makes the pictures fill the screen, each screen being quite large. The resolution is such, that any flaw, as well as any detail can be seen easily. Yael watches but sees little reaction, she looks to Phineas who is smiling. Ok, quiet is good then, she thinks to herself.

“What is this dress made of? Chiffon or silk?” she asks.

“Silk but on the lower grade,” Yael says simply.

“Good, and this one? The embellishment is store bought or sewn in?” she asks scrutinizing the whole of the garment.

“Hand sewn, my first attempt, not my best,” Yael has to admit.

“And this woman in the dress is the bitch we spoke of?” she asks

“Yes maám,” Yael admits.

“I hope the sequence scratches her eyeballs when she takes it off.” Phineas’s aunt says in a serious voice.

Phineas looks at his aunt astonished, then back at Yael who seems equally astonished. Back and forth the aunt walks, Yael’s phone buzzes again. “This is the dress I made for my brother’s mother in law at his wedding.” She says and sends the picture to the woman who is still scrutinizing every inch of the previous pictures.

Phineas watches as his aunt turns on one more screen, this one is even bigger than the rest. “Done!” she calls out and turns around facing her guests while leaning on her table with her hands supporting her on the table as well, she pushes off and comes to Yael, standing right in front of her now. “You are going to be a star my dear. As far as your imagination takes you. I know this woman,” she points to her mother in law.

“I’ve known her for a long, long time, this town is big and small at the same time, you know what I mean? If you put that smile on my old friend’s face and made her look that good. Then kudos to you. I’m sold, but I already was when I stole your vest,” she says as she rubs her hands down the material again.

“So, now what Phineas?” she asks him.

“I don’t know Auntie, what?” he asks.

“Yael, what were you looking to happen at the meeting this morning?” she asks.

“I was hoping to find a mentor who would help me launch myself eventually, actually. Someone to show me the ins and outs and critique my work, with honest criticism,” she says.

“Ok, I can do that. What’s this about a wedding dress I heard Phineas mumble before?” she asks.

Yael tells her about how Jack reacted to the dress and what happened. She then described her ideas that came to her in the car. “You don’t write things down?” the aunt asks.



“No, is that a problem?” Yael asks.

“Only when dealing with a client, they like to see you write down every word they tell you, even if the idea doesn’t make sense, and you know for sure the dress won’t look as they describe in the end. Come, let’s work on this wedding dress. Phineas, be a good boy and go pick up some lunch I’m starved. I probably won’t bite her if you hurry,” she says to him.

“Yael?” he asks.

“I’m ok. Haven’t eaten since our breakfast but I can wait for dinner,” she says.

He turns to leave and Yael turns to this amazing woman, then for reasons unbeknown to herself she shows her what her mother in law wrote. “She means that too.” Mrs. Levingston laughs.

Auntie picks up her phone and dials someone, “Hey you old piece of crap, thank you for sending me this young girl. How the hell did I not get invited to your only daughter’s wedding?” she laughs.

Yael takes a moment to realize who she is on the phone with. And she watches in amazement. This is why she wanted her to go into the business, she was going to make this introduction, or not, but she was certainly going to watch out for her. Yael takes a deep breath and lets it out slowly. Knowing Rae loves her enough to treat her like a daughter is very overwhelming right now.

“Yeah, that was when Miguel was sick, I forgot. Sorry about that. The dress is beautiful, I can’t believe this young thing beat me out of that opportunity. I think so too. Not sure I’m giving this vest back though.” She laughs and laughs some more. Yael watches in amazement. When she gets off the phone she turns to Yael. “Old college friend. My husband was sick when her daughter was getting married. Damn nice job you did. Damn nice. Were you sewing before that?” she asks.

“No, my brother told her that I could do an amazing job. She told me she’d give me one chance because time was of the essence. I guess I got it right the first time,” she says.

“Or you gave her some great raw material where she only needed little things fixed. That’s pretty hard to do for her. She used to be a sewer herself, until her left eye went bad. Now she relies on me. Listen, about this vest.” She starts telling Yael how much she likes this vest as well as how well she thinks something like this will sell in her line. Mrs. Levingston begins to tell Yael how things work when you sell an idea to a designer who owns a line of clothing.

“I believe this will launch you in the sense that I will make sure you get a large portion of the sales, enough that you can live off of, then the rest will be up to you to produce magnificent dresses. Any of them you want me to add or think will make a killing in my line, I’m happy to consider. And believe me I don’t consider much. I liked that little jumper too, the one with the belt and the giant gold leaves on the side. Weird paring and yet, you made them work.”

When she comes up for air Yael is staring at her, “What do I do if she sells my dress to someone?” she asks.

“Won’t be done. I took care of that,” she says

“How, I didn’t see you do anything other than post the picture on your screen. No offense,” she immediately says.

“None taken, I suppose you wouldn’t have seen anything. I sent out the picture to everyone I know in the business saying the item was stolen from me by the woman wearing it, and that



anyone who even thinks of recreating something similar is going to see me in court. They know I’ll go that far too. I go for the jugular when people steal,” the aunt says. “Only one person tried to do something like that to me, he is no longer in the business.”

“So, she is going to have to sit on the dress forever? No one will buy from her?” she asks.

“No one with integrity, and by the time she figures that out, the wedding dress will be done, and if you want, we can launch that too, happens to be kind of fabulous you know, then for sure they will see hers as a copy. And any boutique worth anything won’t buy something without a tag inside. Even the most skilled seamstresses hide their name in the garment somewhere,” she says.

“Like spelling your name in the stitches behind the beading?” she says.

“Genius!! Phineas I love this girl!” she calls to him as he walks in the door.

“Well, that’s good to know Auntie, but does she love you?” he jokes.

“Ha, ha and ha, everyone loves me,” she says with a sneer, “come to the table, let’s eat.

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Three weeks ago, Yael’s life changed drastically, ever since then, she has not stopped working with her hands. She loves this part. She has met up with Jack’s sister three times already, they’ve changed a few things each time. But the underlying design hasn’t changed, only the personal details. Blush pink verses off-white, beads instead of sequence and where to put them all.

Yael’s vest is well on its way to being mass produced and the contract that she signed was approved by her father. At least he took time out of his retirement for her to do this. That made her day. He actually called her directly to discuss two minor issues. Then her mom cried and wished her well, she does that every time they speak now. Dad says this is because she is so proud of her, Yael hopes he is right.

Barrington is surpassing all that has been asked of him in the old office, he told Yael that they used the threat to someone’s life who, at the time, is still officially working there, to get rid of the woman who hurt Yael, legally. No one has heard from her in two weeks. She hasn’t bothered to contact Yael either. In fact, she hasn’t run into her in any of their usual stops. “I wonder where she is?” she says out loud.

“Who is?” her “mother in law” Rae asks.

“You know,” Yael says, “They canned her two weeks ago, no one has heard from or seen her since, not even around town. Don’t you think we would have run into her?” She finishes with actual worry in her voice.

“Don’t give her a second of your mind. She doesn’t deserve to have space there. My guess, is she is doing exactly what Tina said she would, she is trying to sell off your dress to some designer or company to mass produce. What? I speak to my old friend all the time. Hell, of a time she went through, and I couldn’t be there for her because I was wrapped up in the wedding,” she says sounding sad now.

“Is that why you sent them off on a honeymoon so quickly? To be able to help in the end?” she asks.

“Oh, no honey, that actually came from Tina. She would have made the bride’s dress as well as mine and your mother’s, for that matter, for free even, and with her eyes closed. But since



she couldn’t, she discussed a different gift with her husband, and they agreed to pay for the honeymoon. She has been through a lot, so has Phineas, you know,” she says.

“No, I don’t know. We met that crazy day, and then I’ve only seen him once since, and that was by accident, he didn’t know I was meeting his aunt that day. Not sure why. I tried calling him but he won’t answer. His aunt is blaming his lack of answers on his practice but she doesn’t look me in the eye when she says this, like she does with other things. I did something wrong didn’t I? Usually I end up ruining all good things. I thought we’d at least be friends. I’m so tunnel focused on this wedding dress, I don’t breathe without having thread and material in my hand; surely, he knows that, don’t you think? Forget I said anything. I know who I am, I know where I come from. I hope one day I run into him and we can talk again. You wouldn’t believe how easy we found talking over breakfast with a stranger when we first met. But, he was also my doctor that morning, oh why am I so damn dumb?” Yael sets down her materials and walks to the back room, she needs a minute to collect herself.

‘Tina, they haven’t seen each other since the day he brought her to you. Did you know that?’ send

‘What are you talking about woman, he tells me she is good all the time. That she is working hard on the wedding dress and he can’t wait to see it finished.’ Send

‘I’m at her house now. She says he doesn’t answer her texts or calls and that she thought they’d at least be friends, said breakfast together was easy and smooth but she rationalized the encounter now saying the conversation was because he was being her doctor then. Damn it, Tina, I thought this was going to work, he was so excited to bring her to you.’ Send, then she sits down and sighs herself.

‘Having him for dinner tonight, as per our usual get together. Going to wring his neck on this one. She is certainly a keeper ☺.’ Send

Rae smiles at her phone. “What? Good news I hope.” Yael says.

Rae looks up, “Great news. Tina and Phineas are meeting tonight at the steakhouse. Want to surprise them?” she asks.

“No, that would be rude. From what I get, he is very close to his aunt and with his schedule, he probably looks forward to these times alone with her. I’d love to go out with *you* though. How about we head over to the all you can eat pasta bar tonight? Got my first check from selling the vest and I’d love to celebrate with you,” she smiles.

Rae actually finds herself getting tears in her eyes, “I’m such an old hag, you have better friends than me to celebrate with,” she says looking to Yael.

Yael looks down at her hands, “I had a few friends in high school; they left this area and never looked back; not even to stay in touch. I have Barrington but he is busy with Jack these days, which is a great thing, don’t get me wrong, but I don’t want to bother him. They are too new and I really, really want this one to last. I don’t know why, but I really do. Going out with my brother and sister in law is obligation and not celebration. With you, I know we will order wine and have a few laughs even at my expense. What do you say?” she asks again, a bit hopeful in her voice.

“I’m flattered you think of me that way Yael. Would you have done this with me if your parents were here?” she asks.



“In a heartbeat, their version of celebrations is eating a big bowl of ice cream and then some chocolate and if I was lucky there would be one glass of wine between the three of us. No, I prefer food, hence the reason I look like this,” she says looking down at herself.

“There will be none of that. No friend of mine is allowed to be insulted by anyone, including themselves,” she smiles. “Besides, a woman with larger than size A bra cup doesn’t make them fat, on the contrary, I believe nowadays people call having boobs as having curves. My husband always loved mine, I’m sure yours will too, eventually,” she says.

“Rae!” Yael laughs and grabs her purse and keys. “I’m driving, I’ve seen you drive after one glass of wine and I have deadlines to meet.” The two women laugh and head out the door.

“Ok, we have a nice private booth in a quiet restaurant, so tell me what the hell is your problem and why haven’t you at least stayed in touch with Yael, it was clear as a bell that you were attracted to her, even Jack said so.” Tina says to her nephew while slapping his hand.

“Nothing like getting straight to the point, Auntie,” Phineas says. “I have nothing to say on this matter. How was your week?” he asks.

“Lousy and you know why? Because my idiot of a nephew is walking around sulking again and I’m about to kill him which means I’d have to pay for the funeral too and I’m not interested in letting go of that kind of money right now,” she says straight to his face.

“Yes, Yael is pretty, yes, she is talented and is probably going to go far with what she does with you and by herself, but no there is nothing between us because I don’t want there to be,” he says trying to be firm even though he knows there is no point when she is around.

“Bullshit, try again. I’ve got all night,” she says crossing her arms and sitting back in her chair.

Thankfully, the waiter brings their dinner and Phineas has something else to do now. Eat. He hates talking and eating and she knows this so he is hoping things will be quiet, for a few minutes anyway.

“Phineas, she didn’t know who I was until Barrington whispered your last name in her ear. Jack must have told him. She hasn’t been in the business long enough, otherwise she never would have gone to a meeting with Heddy. Everyone knows she sucks, except the uneducated. Heddy is always looking for her next big break, which would have come, had you not been there to stop her. I know you think this is about only one dress, but Jack’s sister would have then paid through the nose to get the same thing because what Yael made on a whim is exactly what she wants. You saved Yael’s life with your own meds. You didn’t even tell her that, did you? No, you probably said it’s a doctor thing and that you are allowed to carry life-saving medications. Sounds good to unsuspecting people but you and I know how much crap that is. Did you refill by the way?” she asks.

He shakes his head, trying hard to finish his food without talking, she is making this quite difficult and she knows she is. “She was my sister Phineas, I miss her too, sometimes I scream at her for not being here for you guys, for not seeing her wonderful grandchildren. No one knew the depth of her despair until the end. Now she is at peace, and you need to learn that many women suffer with depression after giving birth but that shouldn’t stop you from finding that someone you



want to have your own babies with,” she reaches across the table and puts her hand on top of his. “We were an anomaly, my sister and I, we married cousins because we wanted our last names to always be the same. I started dating my husband before we knew they were cousins. I lost her physically, but she is always in my heart.”

“She has everything you need Phineas. Strength, laughter, joy, fun, crazy ass bitch sometimes too.” She smiles at him because she sees he is trying to hold in his smile now. “We’re all a little wacky, your father didn’t stay around long enough to find that out. You aren’t like that. You come from my side of the family, we’re good people Phineas. Jack has been with you through all life gave you too, if he didn’t think you were worth the time and energy he would not give you any of his. You know I’m right. Call her tomorrow. Ask how the wedding dress is coming. You’ll see, you will make her day,” she pats his hands and goes back to her plate to continue eating.

Phineas exhales with a sigh of relief that his aunt has finished talking to him, but now he has lost his appetite, he looks down and sees a half-eaten steak. When was the last time he did that? He pushes the plate forward a little and sits back in his chair

“Women don’t like broken men. I’m good. I have my staff which are great people. My sisters, who keep making more people, Jack and now Barrington, and there is you, always you. How much more does a man need?” he asks.

Tina looks over at her nephew, he is hurting and she can feel the emotions as her own. “Call her now, I don’t trust you to do this tomorrow,” she says.

He looks at her and sees in her eyes that she is daring him to not listen to her. He pulls out his phone and calls Yael.

“Hello?” she asks

“Hi, why are you whispering?” he asks.

“At the pasta bar with Rae celebrating my vest being bought. What are you up to?” she asks.

“I love pasta, but we chose to go to the steakhouse tonight. Maybe next time,” he says. Tina is glaring at him now for not saying anything he wouldn’t say to a stranger. He looks down.

“Rae mentioned you guys were going, we were going to crash, but my pasta craving took over. When I want carbs, there’s no stopping me. Have you heard from Jack today? I sent him something and he never responded, you boys are all alike.” She looks at Rae who gives her a thumbs up response and a smile.

“Um no, I haven’t heard from him, is everything ok?” he asks concerned and sits up straighter.

“Peachy, I sent him an idea for a man’s vest and wanted his opinion since he was the first one to like my women’s version. Hey, maybe you can stop by after you see patients tomorrow and see for yourself.” She says with eyes open to Rae who is now laughing at her for being so bold. The two women smile at each other. Yael sees Rae on her phone, no doubt sending her every word to Tina.

“I don’t know my schedule half the time until I get into the office, tomorrow is my late night.” He mumbles. Tina kicks him under the table. He looks at her angry and she looks back the same way. He loses the stare down and averts his eyes down again.



“You can’t be working later than I do. I’m first seeing Jack’s sister at 10:00 pm tomorrow night, so I’ll be up late. Stop by any time. Unless of course you want Jack to see the vest first. See you tomorrow then.” She cheerfully and hangs up quickly. “How was that?” she asks Rae.

“I’m dying here, was he stammering the whole time?” she asks.

“Sure, he was, he is a guy, but I’m hoping the challenge will work. Men hate losing at things especially to best friends. Don’t they? Ooo, should I tell Jack what I did?” she asks hoping she is right.

“Do you really have a man’s vest?” Rae asks.

“I will by tomorrow.” Yael laughs and so does Rae, so much so, their sides begin to hurt and they are trying to catch their breath.

“We’d best get you home then, maybe I can help,” Rae says.

“Grand idea, I’d love the help. Can you still sew on tiny pearls if I thread the needle for you?” she asks hoping not to insult her.

“Teamwork,” is all Rae says.

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At 1:00 in the morning Yael’s phone is ringing, not buzzing with a text but an actual call. “Damn, must be my parents. Hello?” she says groggily.

“Yaeli, Dad here,” he says slowly.

“I can tell, what’s happened?” she asks leaning against the wall.

“Nothing happened that we didn’t expect to happen,” he says slowly.

Yael is now pacing her house, “What exactly does that mean Dad?” oh crap, she says in her mind and sits down on the floor. This wasn’t a retirement trip, it was an end of life trip. “Where did she die Dad?” she asks quietly.

“I love you Yaeli, you always know me when I can’t find the words. Where she wanted to be, by her parents. Our last stop on our scheduled tour, I’m burying her later today, here where she wants to be. She didn’t want the treatments, didn’t want the excessive pain, so we celebrated life together instead of watching death take over. Are you mad at me? At us? For lying and such,” he says solemnly.

Yael finds herself crying but not for her mother’s death but for her parent’s love, “I want what you had Daddy,” she says knowing he will know what she means.

“I want that for you too Yaeli, I will stay here for a week, her uncle is still alive, he is a hundred and one, if you can believe that, and asked me to help him get through this. You ok? Are you alone?” he asks.

“No, I have Paul, his wife, Rae and a whole slew of new friends from my new work. I made a man’s vest out of your old tweed jacket this evening, the same person who bought the women’s vest is going to love this one too, I’m beginning to be confident with my work. You don’t mind, do you?” she asks.

“Ha, that old thing, send me a picture. Take a day off tomorrow maybe, spend time with Paul. I’ve got to go, her uncle came back and we have to finalize everything. Love to you for today, and in the future,” he hangs up.

Numbly, Yael dials her phone, “Hello?” she hears a groggy male voice.



“Mom’s gone, this was a trip for them to celebrate their lives together and not watch death come over her. Dad just called me. She is being buried today,” she says softly.

“Yael?” the voice asks

“Yes, I’m here,” she says.

“This is Phineas, do you want me to come over?” he says.

“Oh, crap on a stick, I meant to call Paul, you’re next to him in my contacts,” she hangs up. “You are such a pigheaded idiot!!” she yells at herself and dials her brother this time.

“What do we do from here?” he asks after she tells him what happened overseas.

“I don’t know, I suppose we can mourn her at my house, their house, whatever it is now, the place where she lived for over thirty years. You want to come over tomorrow? We’ll make an announcement to the community. That’s probably best. People will want to know,” she says, “I’ll have to call Jack and let him know I can’t work on his sister’s dress this week,” she says.

“Hey Yaeli, Desiree here, your brother can’t talk right now. We’ll be over in the morning, say around 11:00 or as early as he can, by then the word will be out and people will start to come over. I’ll be there to help after I send the kids off to school. You ok?” she asks.

“Yeah, doesn’t their decision make you jealous? I mean, I want what they had, you know what I mean?” she asks.

“From my perspective, I have that. I want it for you though, with all my heart I want this for you,” she says with tears in her eyes and hangs up. She looks at her husband who is now sitting on the floor looking at her with sorrowful eyes and so much love at the same time. So much love.

Yael finds herself unable to move for a few minutes, then she realizes that her house is going to be full of people soon. She must start cleaning up, she has sewing things in almost every room. She jumps up and starts clearing the area around her immediately, in the bedroom. Her frenzied pace has her on her third room already, she has no idea what time it is right now. She keeps hearing knocking noises and supposes it’s the house making noises because she is rarely up at this hour so she doesn’t know for sure. Suddenly someone grabs her shoulders and shakes her, “Yael!” he calls.

She looks in front of her and blinks a few times, “I have to get the house ready, everything is a mess; there will be people here before you know it,” she stares, still not one hundred percent sure who is holding her. She is shaken again, and in a softer voice she hears, “Yael, Phineas is here. We’ll do this together, what room are you up to?” he asks. He knows she is in a state of shock and isn’t really recognizing who he is or what he says but the word help she hears.

“I did the upstairs bedrooms and bathroom already, as soon as I called Paul. But I only put things away, needs to be vacuumed. And maybe check the bathroom again, I don’t know,” she says.

He looks around the room they are in and sees the vacuum out. “Ok, I’ll get the upstairs, you go to the kitchen. Put everything away but don’t wash what is dirty I’ll do that when I come down. You hear me?” he asks with concern.

“Put away, don’t wash. Put away don’t wash.” She repeats and walks towards the kitchen. Then he takes his phone out and sends a message to Rae about Yael’s state of mind and thanks her for the key.



‘Ok, bring the vacuum upstairs but don’t turn it on, she won’t know the difference. Glance in each room to make sure they are presentable. I’ll be there shortly and I’ll vacuum, you keep an eye on her. She will snap out of her stupor soon. She is strong, but all the burden is on her now.’ Send. Rae sighs, she is hoping it wasn’t too accidental that she called Phineas first. She rushes to get dressed and calls Tina to let her in on what is going on.

Phineas does as he is told. The upstairs is very well kept and each room looks as if it has been cleaned, he checks closets to make sure nothing has been thrown in there by mistake. Perfectly clean, the woman is amazing. He runs downstairs to see she is still in the kitchen; she is putting things away like a robot.

He grabs her again and turns her around to face him, “Yael! Wake up!!” he shakes her lightly, and her head falls forward for a moment. She picks herself up slowly. “Phineas?” she asks. “Yes,” he says.

“My mom is dead. The guests are coming. I did the upstairs,” she says and he puts his finger on her lips.

“I know, you called me. I’m here, here for you, you’re not alone in this. Rae is coming over too. Did you eat or drink since dinner last night?” he asks looking at the dishes in the sink.

She looks to where he is looking. “I think I took them all out just now. Can I sit down?” she asks.

“Yes,” he helps her to the kitchen table. “Tell me where it all goes and we’ll get everything done together. You and me,” he says.

Yael begins to tell him where things go, she had been taking everything out when she was supposed to be putting the dishes away. Her head is clearer now, but her heart isn’t any lighter. This hurts, her wanting to die without her kids. “It’s not nice, to not say goodbye,” she says out loud.

“Goodbyes are nice to have,” he says to her.

“Maybe a bit selfish almost, they didn’t tell us the truth,” she says.

“You’d be waiting by the phone all these months, you’d be asking a million questions every time they called, they would not have enjoyed this time together as they wanted,” he says watching her for a reaction.

“I didn’t think that way, you’re right. I would have asked about her health each time and I would have been a pest. I’m like that, you know. Oh no, that’s why she cried every time they called, isn’t it? Each goodbye could have been goodbye,” she says as she wipes a tear from her cheek. “Why am I so dumb Phineas?”

“Maybe, I don’t know for sure, but I don’t think you’re a pest when someone asks questions out of concern and love,” he says.

“I want what they had. I want the kind of love that you would travel the world for your spouse to see things they never saw, before they die. That’s what I’m looking for. I’ll never get someone like that though,” she says

“Why not?” he asks innocently while still cleaning the kitchen. Some of the dirty dishes have been mixed with the clean ones, so he is washing all of them.



“Phineas are you for real? I’m only thirty-five years old and I’m already on my second career, doesn’t exactly speak volumes about my stability now, does it? I’m not shaped like the average women, I have curves, as they say, but to most people it means I’m fat and unsightly. Not sure when wearing a size eight or ten had become fat, but in our society, I am,” she says.

“Personally, I like the way you look,” he says to her honestly. He is remembering carrying her off the stretcher and laying her on his bed in the hotel, he was lost there for a moment before putting her down, it was very hard for him to let go.

“You know what I am? I’m every man’s best friend. I’m the one girl they all feel comfortable around to talk about anything because they have no romantic feelings towards me at all. You know the last time someone whistled at me was? Um, never,” she says in disgust. She hates all that whistling anyway.

Phineas is trying hard not to yell back at her, he knows her head is not in the right place, so he tries very hard not to argue. “Yael, let’s agree to disagree on that one for now. Come, the kitchen is done, how about we do the dining room next?” he asks. She follows him out to the dining room. He begins to laugh.

“What could be so damn funny right now?” she asks.

“You’re as bad as my Auntie, where can we put all these scraps of material so they don’t get messed up. I know you know what each piece is for, so you’d best be making piles and I can take the piles somewhere,” he says still smiling.

“Oh, um. Good point. Ok, get that box on the floor, let’s put them all in there, but lay them exactly how they are on the table. It will fit, don’t worry, then that box will slide right under the couch. Trust me on that one,” she finds herself smiling a bit.

“Ok, you two, where do you need me? Oh yeah upstairs or did you vacuum already Phineas?” Rae asks.

“No, we’ve been doing the kitchen and now we’re on to the dining room,” he says.

Rae walks over to Yael and gives her a big hug and a kiss on the cheek. “I wish I did that for my husband. Best I did was take him to the zoo once or twice. Come upstairs with me Yael, so you can shower, Phineas knows how to clean up. Come, come,” she says pushing Yael towards the stairs.

When they get upstairs Rae directs Yael to her room to shower and helps her find the right clothes to put on when she comes out. Then she sets out to vacuum the upstairs and double checks the second bathroom to make sure guests can come in easily if they want to set their jackets down.

Phineas has been joined by Jack and Barrington who are lifting furniture and cleaning out underneath them with a second vacuum they found. Every time they hear clinking in the vacuum they laugh knowing most likely they sucked up another pin.

The three men work together seamlessly in the living room and in the den. They go through the front closet and remove many of the coats so the hangers can be used for guests, they put the coats from the closet in the den and close the door.



Phineas has been cleaning what he thinks of as the back, guest bedroom and comes out wearing a really nice men’s vest. Jack, having found everything out from Rae, looks at Phineas and says, “I believe that’s my vest,” he smiles.

“Um, going to have to say no on that one. You have to answer your call to get first dibs, besides, it fits me like a glove, which means this would be too big for you. Looks rather nice on me I think, don’t you?” he smiles at Jack who inwardly is cheering. Way to go Yael, he thinks to himself.

“I want one.” Barrington says.

“Want one what?” Yael says from behind him.

“One of those, how come I didn’t get one. I’ve known you longer. Damn girl this is so not fair,” he teases her.

Yael looks to where he is pointing, she sees Phineas standing tall wearing her father’s vest made from his old tweed jacket and some material from an old suit she found next to it. “Not everyone can wear a vest,” she says to Barrington with a smile on her face.

Rae comes down the stairs in time to hear this exchange, she is happy that Phineas put it on and even happier that he is bragging about how the item fits. She takes a deep breath and walks down the rest of the stairs. “Ok boys, how about you go to the basement now,” she says.

The three men moan as if they are ten years old being asked to do one more annoying chore. “What’s in the basement?” Jack asks.

“I’m assuming folding chairs, this place will be full tomorrow,” Rae says. “Which really means later today.”

“Oh, good point, you’ll find them in the far end from the stairs, sorry, Dad always said it was the best place to keep them. Thank you,” she says trying to smile. They groan some more and head towards the basement stairs.

“Thank you Rae,” she pauses, “for everything.”

“Yael, I know you’re an adult, but some things should not be left to do alone, this is one of them. Come sit with me on the couch, I think you could use some sleep. Jack said your dad called around 1:00 this morning,” she pushes her to the couch.

“I was in such a stupor I called Phineas before Paul, isn’t that funny? I only have two people in my contacts with the letter P at the beginning and I dial wrong,” she grins.

“Or not.” Rae hands Yael a pillow to rest her head on. The men come upstairs and Rae signals to them to be quiet. They immediately quiet down. Once the foyer floor is washed and the furniture dusted, the house is finally ready for the onslaught of guests that will be coming for the next few days. Rae brings them all into the kitchen. “OK, who is staying where and for how long?” she asks looking at all of them.

Phineas speaks first, “I’ll stay here, I already called my secretary, she is going to pull a couple of stand-ins for me for the week, I’m on call for emergency consultations only,” he says.

“You woke your assistant at 2:00 in the morning?” Rae asks.

“In this kind of emergency, yes, is that wrong?” he asks.

“No, honey, no its not. Now you boys, what will it be? I need to know what is going on” she is using her mother voice now.



“I can take off for the next two days, nothing much going on right now,” Jack says. “Plus, tomorrow I mean or is it today, whatever you know what I mean.”

“Barrington?” she asks.

“To be honest, I’m not good with crowds, how about I come back on the last couple of days when things taper off a bit?” He says honestly. “I’ll be in and out, during off times.”

“Great, so we’re covered. Now, if anyone asks, all food prep is being done in this house, we don’t want to accept food from anyone. If they push, tell them to donate food to a shelter in May’s memory. Between Phineas and Yael’s allergies I’m not taking chances with anyone. I’m going to write you up a grocery list Jack, you two can go over to the grocers on Elm; they open at 6:30 now and stay open until 10:00pm. Don’t know how they do this, but they’re fully stocked all day. 5:30 now, why don’t you two go out for coffee now and I’ll text you the list when I’m finished compiling the whole thing, we’ve got this for now,” Rae says.

“Ok, call us if we have to run back,” Jack says.

“Will do,” Rae tells them then looks to Phineas and points to the couch.

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“Hello?” Rae whispers on Yael’s phone.

“Hello, Yaeli?” her father asks.

“Hi Byron, its Rae. I’m sorry to hear about May. How are you handling things? I hope you’re not alone,” she says.

“Her uncle is still alive and many, many cousins. More than I knew existed. So, no, not alone, almost too much family, if you know what I mean. How is my baby?” he asks

Rae looks over at the couch, she sees that Yael has shifted herself off of the pillow and onto Phineas’s lap, he shrugs his shoulders and leans his head back to try and get a few minutes of rest as well.

“We’re doing ok. She is sleeping on the couch with Phineas now.” Rae takes the phone into the back room to fill him in on the blooming love he is missing out on, the good news does his heart good. She tells them how they met all the way up to last night’s dinner challenge.

“That’s my girl. How does the vest look? She told me when I called her that she made one out of my old tweed jacket,” he says.

“Hold on.” Rae quickly walks back out to the living room and takes a picture of the two on the couch.

“Well, damn fine looking vest, nice looking boy too. You swear by him Rae? I trust your judgement,” he says.

“With all my heart, been through a mess himself, could use a little mending. Tina’s nephew.” She is hoping she doesn’t have to say more.

“I went to high school with his dad. Hated him then too, hate him more now. He once told me that May was a two-bit whore. Guess who accidently fell down the stairs after that?” he asks.

“No, really?” Rae asks. “I never knew someone could say a bad word about May,” she says.

“Neither could anyone around him, when he said it. He listed everyone around as a witness and they all had an alibi as to where they were when the alleged push happened.



She was surrounded by cousins and her uncle in the end. May always was surrounded by love, everywhere we went. They left the room for a moment and then she squeezed my hand, I kissed her and it was all over. No more pain Rae, she is with her mom and dad now,” he says finally breaking down to a good friend.

Rae waits for him to finish crying. She is sure there will many days when this will happen to him. “Byron, the kids aren’t mad you know. They understand, Desiree and Yael keep saying how romantic a gesture you did. How they want that forever kind of love. I haven’t seen Paul yet, he is going to come soon. I’ve been here helping to clean up the house getting ready for the onslaught of guests.” She says to somehow comfort him from this far away.

“You know, I hate crowds, better this way then, I think. I’ll be home in a week. I promised May I’d finish our tour, but I think she knew I wouldn’t. Don’t you?” he asks.

“She knew. Byron, things will be happy again for you, you have beautiful children and grandchildren and they keep coming. Paul and Desiree want a house full, they keep telling me, so you’d best make it back here, if for no other reason, than to help out an old friend keep up with the grandkids,” she smiles.

“Yeah and a good steak, all these places we’ve been to and you’d think I could get a good steak. Nothing doing. Only tiny things on a plate to look pretty. I don’t want my steak to look pretty I want it to taste good. One steak dinner for old friends, my treat,” he says.

“Be careful a girl can get used to steak dinners,” she jokes.

“Thanks Rae, for everything, the support, your love and friendship, all these years. I’ll see you soon.” Byron hangs up and allows himself a few minutes to reflect on how lucky he has been in finding friends. Life has been good with his May, it will be good without her, his friends will make his life happy. He smiles a bit and lays his head down remembering the picture of his little girl and the man in the vest that may bring her the forever she is looking for.

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“Yael, time to wake up sweetheart. I want you to eat before people start coming,” Phineas whispers in her ear.

Yael opens one eye and then the other, looking down at her is Phineas’s smiling face. “What time is it?” she asks.

“8:00, you’ve slept for only a couple of hours but hopefully tonight I’ll get you to bed early,” he says, then realizes what he says but before he can retract his statement she begins to laugh and sit up slowly.

She pushes into him with her shoulder, “Nice vest,” she smiles and stands up to walk into the kitchen she already smells food being made. “Morning Rae, thank you for letting me sleep, albeit only a couple of hours, but much needed. Phineas says I’m under doctor’s orders to eat breakfast, what have we got?” she ask.

“Jack made pancakes with blueberries or chocolate chips,” Barrington says.

“You still here?” she looks at Barrington and smiles, she walks over to her old friend and gives him a big hug, he returns the favor and holds her tightly, he bows his head to kiss her on top of her head. “Ok but for dinner I want your meatballs,” she smiles at him.



“You remember those?” he asks.

“My stomach sure does, Phineas can’t eat them though. Your secret ingredient will kill him,” she smiles.

“No worries, there are substitutes for that,” he kisses her again, “wait here I’ll make you a special hot chocolate, you still have what I gave you for your birthday?” he asks.

“Yep, top cabinet, but you’d better make enough to share with everyone,” she laughs.

“Yeah, I love hot chocolate. You want pancakes or should I make you eggs?” Phineas asks.

“Hey, I made breakfast today, you can be healthy tomorrow,” Jack hits Phineas in the arm. Everyone laughs.

“What’s so funny?” Paul says.

“Freshly made eggs or pancakes big brother?” she asks.

“Ha! I had both at home. But the hot chocolate smells good. I’ll have one of those.” He smiles and pulls up a chair next to Yael and gives her a hug. “You ok?” he asks.

“With friends like these? How can I be anything but?” she says.

“Nice vest Phineas.” He turns to Yael and whispers, “Looks like Dad’s old jacket.” And by the look in her eyes he knows he guessed right. He ruffles her hair and laughs.

“Anybody talk to Dad since he first called?” Paul asks.

“I did, he is doing ok. Happy to avoid all the crowds that will be here for the next few days. Promised to take me for a steak dinner, said with all these fancy restaurants they went to not a damn one can make a decent steak, he told me.” Rae smiles and everyone laughs, they all know how he loves a good steak and how he hates to eat alone. At least most of them know this.

“Desiree says she will come after she drops off the kids and handles things at work and such. I’m sorry I didn’t come last night baby girl,” he says.

“No worries, I had plenty of help.” She kicks Phineas’s leg softly under the table and he puts his arm around her shoulder.

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The word onslaught didn’t even begin to describe how many people came in and out of the house all day. By 8:00 in the evening Jack begins to push people out of the house. They finally closed the door at 10:00pm and hung a sign that the door will be open again tomorrow at 9:00 in the morning and for everyone to please respect the wishes of the mourners.

Rae, Desiree, Jack and Barrington started to clean up at 9:00pm or they would never have been done. “People are pigs, maybe tomorrow we only put out drinks, no reason to feed everyone all day is there?” Jack says.

“It gives people something to do. We should put out garbage cans all over the house; that might help.” Barrington says.

“Good idea, Yael, do you have any other big cans?” Rae asks.

“Sure downstairs, Dad always kept extras for our outdoor parties, no reason not to use them inside, they’re clean from being down there all the time and not out in the garage. I’ll get them,” she says and begins to stand up, a large hand pulls her back down on the couch. “No,” Phineas says and gets up.



Paul scoots closer to his sister, “Want me to stay tonight?” he asks.

“I believe Phineas is staying tonight, you should go home and see your kids in the morning, make life normal for them. They are little, they won’t understand why they don’t see you for morning tickles and chocolate milk,” Yael teases.

“Hey, they finish their milk, don’t they?” he laughs leaning onto her.

“I suppose they do, you’re a great father Paul, you know that? Go take your pregnant wife home, she should not be on her feet all day like this,” she says.

Paul pulls away from his sister for a moment and looks at her, “I can tell, it’s a gift,” she smiles and gives him a big hug. “Populate the world with love big brother.”

“I aim to,” he smiles. “Desiree,” he calls to his wife, “come, we’re being kicked out.” He kisses his sister one more time. And the happy couple leave.

“Don’t you let her be on her feet so much tomorrow Jack or I’ll personally kill you.” Yael says sternly.

“Again?!” Rae says throwing her hands up in glee.

“I’m good at figuring these things out,” Yael laughs.

“Byron is going to owe me two steaks now,” Rae laughs.

“Go home Rae, I’m good, really.” Yael says. “Jack, Barrington? You’re not staying are you?” she asks.

“No, honey, we’re headed home. But I’ll be back tomorrow. I’m proud of Barrington here who made it through the day with all these people. Tomorrow’s breakfast is cinnamon muffins but I have to get here before the healthy police stops me.” He smiles and bends down to kiss Yael who is now finally sitting down on the couch. Barrington follows him, “I’ll be back when the crowds die down,” he smiles at her. “One day was enough for me.”

“Bear, you’re the best. Send my love to everyone in the old office,” she says.

“You got it girly girl. Love you.” He bends down to kiss her too, then pulls her in for a big hug. “Keep him,” he whispers. She smiles at him.

“I’m going to head out too dearie. I’ll be back in the morning probably before you want to see me,” Rae says. “Don’t get up. I’ve got a key, we all do. Oh, don’t look at me like that, I had Jack make copies today.” She sits down next to Yael for a moment, “You ok for the night?” she asks.

“Who knows.” Yael says taking a deep breath.

“You call if you need a woman here, call ok? Any time,” she says. Yael nods because Rae’s gesture is so kind and sincere she is going to cry.

When the last of her friends walk out the door, Phineas is there to lock the door again. “Come, sleep time. You can get in a good six hours before everyone comes back, if you go up now,” he says with his hand out towards Yael.

She reaches up for his hand and finds herself sitting there feeling the warmth of his hand and not moving. She looks up at him, “Damn nice vest.”

Without thinking Phineas responds with, “Yeah, my girlfriend made this, special for me,” he smiles actually not regretting his words.



Yael stands up now pulling herself into his arms, she reaches her arms around his neck and smiles, she stands on her tiptoes and kisses his cheek, “I could use some sleep.” she says. Yael slides her hands down from his neck but slides one hand into his, they walk upstairs together.

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Each day her friends came back, her brother and sister in law made sure to be there too, Rae stayed over a couple of nights because Phineas was called in on medical emergencies. She has never felt so much love before in her life.

For the first time in her adult life Yael feels she has an actual circle of friends. Her father decided to call each day before he was going to sleep and spoke to both of his children, Desiree, Rae and even some of the guests when they got wind he was on the phone.

This is their last night of mourning and Yael is not sure what is going to be with Phineas, while he made his decree on that first night, he has said nothing since then. Rae hinted to her that his life has had its ups and downs when it comes to parental involvement, and Jack told her he had a broken heart for a long time due to the actions of one woman.

Auntie Tina came over a couple of times to keep her informed as to how things were going for her and for Yael, she practically ripped the vest off of Phineas and promised to bring Yael another contract before the week was over, she did too. Her father approved of course.

Yael watches as Phineas walks around her house cleaning and keeping on top of the guests to make sure they don’t overstay their welcome. He and Jack act like the best of brothers and it warms her heart to see Barrington being accepted so quickly as a third musketeer in their group.

Rae has overwhelmed her with love and devotion, as her mother would have given her. For her part, Yael has kept herself together, cried here and there with tales from guests about her mom but for the most part, she has only shed tears in private, in the shower, in her pillow.

Now things are coming to an end. Her dad will be back in three more days and things will move on. But where are they moving is the big question. She will start working on the dress again, Rae has done some beading this week to relax and give her something to do during the quiet times; that has helped a lot. But tomorrow, ah tomorrow she sighs.

Phineas locks the door, everyone is gone, the house is cleaned up, chairs have been brought back downstairs, same as the extra garbage cans. He stands and watches Yael in deep contemplation on the couch. Oh, how he wants to kiss her, but he is so afraid. The last time he opened up, he was used up and all the energy he had for life was sucked right out of him. He stands frozen.

Yael doesn’t seem to notice him right now, maybe that’s good. She is in a trance again, most likely overthinking everything she has to do tomorrow, now that the mourning period is over and she has to get back to life.

Even though his feet feel as if they are wearing lead shoes, he makes his way over to the couch and sits next to her. They have talked so much this past week, but not about the real stuff. The important stuff.

“Yael?” He asks trying not to disrupt her too much.



Yael turns to look at Phineas. “You can go home now Phineas, I’m ok,” she says giving him the out she thinks he wants.

“You’re kicking me out?” he asks.

“Don’t you want to leave?” she asks.

“No, and I don’t know why not,” he says honestly. “I don’t know what to do about you Yael, you’re the most beautiful person I know both inside and out. There is part of me that wants to shout that information from the roof but there is part of me that wants to run so fast to get away,” he says while looking in her eyes.

“Where will you run to?” she asks.

“Far enough away so that I can’t get hurt. I’m a broken man, my seams have been ripped open before and what was exposed has never been repaired. I don’t do pain well, this week has been surprisingly ok for me, I wanted to be here for you. You gave me the strength to be here during all this sadness. Your sadness,” he says.

“You can’t mean that Phineas, no one wants to be anyplace because of me, they usually want to leave for that reason,” she says.

“How can a woman of your magnitude be down on herself? I don’t like hearing those words, they hurt me, inside here,” he takes her hand and puts it on his chest where his heart now beats even faster because she is touching him.

“Phineas, you’re a successful doctor, you save lives in your spare time as an emergency paramedic, I make clothes, sure it’s fun, but important?” she asks. “Nothing about me brings me up to your level of wonder, and besides, no one else can wear a vest like you,” she says trying to smile.

Phineas digs deep inside himself because he knows that right now the time has come for him to do more showing than telling. He quickly grabs her cheeks and with but a moment of hesitation long enough to look into her eyes and he pulls her in for a kiss. First, he is tender and showing her how much he is scared, possibly more than she is, until he finally lets his body speak the words he can’t find inside of him, and pulls her in for a kiss that he hopes she feels as deeply as he is giving.

When he finally parts from her, there are tears in her eyes. Phineas panics for a moment. “I sure hope you meant that,” she says.

He scoots closer to her and pulls her in for a hug, he lays her head on his chest and takes a deep breath or two, her arms slowly slide down his sides and around his back, there they stay for a long time, holding and not talking.

“I’m tired Phineas, we both have to go to work tomorrow, don’t we?” she asks

“But tonight, my dear Yael,” he pulls away and lifts her chin so he can look into her eyes, “tonight, I believe you have begun to mend what is so broken for so long inside of me.”

“I need to sleep Phineas. I can’t do this on such sleep deprivation,” she says.

“And you will, but tonight, it will be in my arms,” he says and they stand to go upstairs.