

COMING TO LA

NEW YORK

“Are you sure this is a good idea?” Richard handed Willamena a healthy glass of red wine.

“Are you saying it’s not?” Willamena asked instead of an answer.

Richard chuckled. “This is why psychiatrists don’t have conversations with each other. All we do is ask questions and get no answers.”

Willamena smiled. “It’s a good idea. Most of my patients are there in Los Angeles. The ones here that need more than a video chat session, I’ll refer to you. You should be pushing me out the door, not questioning my decisions.”

“Perhaps my motives are more of the personal nature.” Richard sat next to Willamena on the couch.

Willamena tsked. “We have had an on again off again fling since we met in med school, Richard. Do you know how long that’s been? Neither of us has wanted it to become more. Now that I’m leaving, you decide you want more?”

“You know what they say; “You never know what you have until it’s gone.” I’m proposing that you stay, and we see where this goes.” Richard placed his hand over Willamena’s and frowned when she slipped hers away.

“If I stayed, *this* would go on the exact same way it has for years. We find other people for a week or two, realize it isn’t working, then use each other.”

“I wouldn’t call it *using* each other, Willamena.”

“No? What would you call it, Dr. Butler?” Willamena stood and took a sip from her wine. Richard Butler was a fine man. An even better psychiatrist. But when it came to having a relationship, he was lacking. His misogyny came out in the most inopportune moments. That was one of the reasons she never allowed herself to fall for him. It was bad enough she kept going back to him when she needed a man’s touch. As a psychiatrist, she realized what she was doing. By knowing she would never have romantic feelings for this man, she was protecting herself from every genuinely getting involved. It saved her heart from being broken. *That’s* what she kept telling herself.

“We have an . . . understanding, Willamena. One that I would like to discuss the logistics of now.”

“Now. I have a flight in the morning, Richard. My bags are packed.”

Richard stood. “They can be unpacked. You haven’t sold your place. That means you’re not fully on board with this decision.”

Willamena held her breath for five seconds, then let it out slowly. “No, it means I’m keeping my place here for when I visit. New York will always be a home for me. But it won’t be my *only* home from now on. I’m sorry, Richard. There’s nothing more to discuss.”

“You’ve become too close to your patients, Willamena.”

“One who happens to be my niece. I do not deny having a more personal bond with some of my patients in LA. That’s not the only reason I’m going. What we’re doing here is not healthy,

Richard. We close ourselves off to everyone else and do that by keeping each other on the back burner if we happen to be lonely one night.”

Richard touched Willamena’s shoulder. She was standing with her back to him, staring out the window of his high-rise office. “Willamena, I feel you're too emotional.”

Willamena shrugged him off. “Don’t try to shrink me, Richard. You should remember that *I* was top in our class, not you. This move has nothing to do with you. And as much as you’d like to believe I’m too involved with my patients, it has nothing to do with them, either. I need a change.”

“You’re still holding guilt when it comes to your niece,” Richard stated with annoyance. He didn’t like being reminded that she was smarter than he was.

“Maybe I am,” Willamena agreed without hesitation. “Maybe I’m ready to be closer to the only family I have left.”

“Or perhaps you’re feeling the need to find . . .”

“Stop, Richard. The things I told you in confidence — doctor to doctor — were not said for you to use them against me.”

“That’s not what I’m trying to do. Look, why don’t we go to my place. We can have some dinner, relax a bit. Then we can talk about this with clear heads.”

Willamena laughed. “Your idea of relaxing includes half a bottle of bourbon and a quick romp. Neither of which offer clear heads. Besides, I have an early flight.” He didn’t need to know she was using the Sumptor jet. “I came here tonight to say goodbye, Richard.”

LOS ANGELES

Willamena stood at Rebecca and Cass's door and waited for someone to answer. It wasn't the first time she wondered if she should have called to announce her arrival, but she had wanted to surprise her niece. The entire move would be a surprise to *all* her LA-based patients. Even Eve, whose jet she used, thought it was just a visit. She smiled when she thought of patients like Hunter Vale, who would probably want to keep using video chat as their preferred method for sessions.

"Yes?" Rebecca was laughing, holding a blanket around her breasts, hair mussed. Her laughter immediately stopped when she saw who was at the door. "Oh! Aunt Wills! I, uh . . ."

Willamena nearly turned around to get back in her rental car and drive back to the airport. *Yep, I should have announced my arrival.* "I'm sorry, I'm interrupting." She did start to back up.

"No, ma'am!" she heard Cass call out from her hiding place behind the door.

Rebecca smirked. "Go get dressed, baby," she told Cass softly. "You, my lovely aunt, will get in this house."

"Not if things are lying around that can be seen but can't be *unseen*."

"Cassidy! Clean up the toys so Aunt Wills will come inside the house, please!"

"Babe! We didn't. . .there isn't. . .why are you. . ."

Rebecca snorted with laughter at her wife's obvious distress.

Aunt Wills smiled and shook her head. "It's not nice to tease her like that."

"Eh, it keeps the relationship fresh."

“Dear, I think that’s what sex is for.” It was Willamena’s turn to laugh when Rebecca blushed.

“What’s the matter, Mistress? You can give it but can’t take it?”

“Shut up,” Rebecca muttered. “You, too!” she shouted at Cassidy, who was currently laughing her ass off. “Are you going to come in?”

“Is everyone decent?” Willamena asked, eyeing Rebecca’s blanket toga.

“Depends on the mood.” Rebecca stuck her tongue out at her aunt. “Cassidy is dressed. I’m covered. Nothing is lying around that will shock your innocent senses.”

“Innocent,” Cass snorted, then sobered when Aunt Wills stepped in. “I just meant that you’ve probably heard a lot of things in all the years you’ve been a doc. Not that you’re old! I mean . . .”

“Cassidy, baby, perhaps you should ask Aunt Wills if she wants something to drink.”

“Right. So, um, alcohol?”

Willamena looked at her watch. “At 9:30 in the morning? Maybe just coffee?”

Cass nodded and took off towards the kitchen.

“9:30 in the morning,” Willamena said again. “You’re up and, well, *up*.”

Rebecca laughed. “We fell asleep down here last night in front of the Christmas tree. Cassidy loves the lights. She says the “different hues” cast an almost ethereal glow to my skin.”

“Are we getting into too much information territory here?”

“No,” Rebecca smiled. “She was painting me. Anything after that is too much information territory.”

“Enough said.” Willamena put her purse on the table near the door. “I’m sorry for barging in like this.”

“You’re always welcome here,” Cass said, handing Aunt Wills a cup of steaming coffee. “But, um, I’ve been really good. I only spank Rebecca when she asks me to.”

Willamena nearly spat out the sip of coffee she just took. “That was mean. I stuck up for you!”

Cass chuckled. “Sorry.”

“Well, I’m just glad that we can joke about it now and that you’re not upset with me.” Willamena followed the couple to the couch and set her cup on the coffee table. “Is it safe to sit here?”

Rebecca and Cass eyed each other.

“Maybe we should go into the kitchen,” Rebecca suggested.

“You both are rotten!” Willamena scolded and purposefully sat down on the couch.

“I learned from the best,” Rebecca teased and sat in Cassidy’s lap when she sat in the recliner they had recently purchased. The recliner had come in a set, but the other one had not held up during a particularly raucous round of lovemaking. “Not that I don’t always love your visits, but what brings you here?”

“Well, it just so happens I’m moving.”

“Moving?” Cass sat up quickly, nearly dumping her wife on the floor. Her quick reflexes saved Rebecca and Cass’s ass. If she had let Rebecca fall, there would *definitely* be punishment later. *Hmm*, Cass thought with interest.

“Don’t even think about it,” Rebecca whispered in her ear. “I’ll withhold *sex* for that.”

Cass’s arms tightened around Rebecca immediately. “Ahem, moving where?” she asked Aunt Wills, trying to get the conversation back on course.

“Here.”

“Here?!” This time it was Rebecca who practically came out of her seat. “As in here in this house?”

“She’s more than welcome, babe,” Cass said. There was no way she was getting on Aunt Wills’s bad side. She didn’t want to get on Rebecca’s bad side either, but Cass thought there were things she could do — creative things — to turn that situation around.

“Of course she is. I’m just surprised.”

“Are you two done?” Willamena asked dryly. She almost lost her composure when they both muttered “yes, ma’am” with the faces of chastised children. “I don’t want to move into your house. I’ve bought one of my own.”

“You’ve bought. . .” Rebecca stared at her aunt. There was no mention of this on their last phone call. Wills never even eluded to the fact that she was *thinking* of moving here. “How long have you been planning this?”

Willamena shrugged. “Since before your wedding, I suppose. Honestly, it’s been on my mind for years. But you, Rebecca, needed your space to heal. Maybe I needed to heal myself before I could allow myself to be close without driving you insane. You being with Cass has been a godsend for both of us.”

Cass's chest puffed with pride. *She* helped the great doctor? She didn't know how that was possible, but if the doc wanted to give her credit, Cass was sure as hell going to take it!

Rebecca patted Cassidy's leg. She knew Aunt Wills's words went straight to Cassidy's heart. "Okay, I can understand that. But why didn't you tell me? I could have helped you."

"I wanted it to be a surprise, silly. If I had told you, I wouldn't have had this funny memory of you two falling all over yourselves."

Cass snickered, and Rebecca rolled her eyes. "We also wouldn't have been doing what we were doing had we known you were going to show up."

"Please!" Willamena laughed. "You so would have! You're Rebecca and Cass! I would probably think something was wrong if you weren't doing what you were doing. The only thing that surprised me was you, Rebecca, being awake so early."

"That was my fault," Cass grinned. She lifted a shoulder. "I didn't feel like going down to my gym, so I went down . . ."

Rebecca covered her wife's mouth. "Don't you dare finish that sentence."

"My not so innocent senses can figure it out, thank you," Willamena smiled wickedly.

"Anyway," Rebecca interjected with authority. "I'm sure you've thought about this, about your work, and everything else." It wasn't a question, but Willamena nodded, nonetheless. "What will your New York patients do?"

"I've referred the ones who need to be in an actual office to a colleague. The others will do as you have for years — video conferencing. Technology is wonderful. Besides, I've wanted to cut back a little."

Rebecca hopped off Cassidy's lap and took a seat next to her aunt. "Are you okay? Are you sick?"

"No, my darling girl." Willamena took Rebecca's hand. "I'm not sick. But I'm also no longer a spring chicken. Then there's the psychiatrist burnout."

Cass leaned forward, her elbows on her knees. "Psychiatrist burnout?"

Willamena nodded. "It can be a stressful job. We have a thirty-nine percent burnout rate, and that's just those who are brave enough to report why they leave the profession."

"Is that what's happening? Are you burning out?" Rebecca asked carefully.

"No." Willamena hesitated. "Well, maybe. A little. I will *always* be here for you and Cass. And the others that I've become close to. But perhaps a little break, some traveling, some rest and relaxation would be just what I need to rejuvenate."

"You're retiring?" Cass wondered.

"No!" Willamena laughed. "I'm not *that* old. Just a break. There are things I want to do that I've been putting off for a while now."

"Because of me," Rebecca guessed.

"No, because of life, my sweet girl. Now that I have access to a very swank private jet, I felt it would be a good time to revisit old haunts."

"Where do you want to go?" Cass asked with absolute interest.

“Oh, I don’t know. When I was in med school, I took a holiday to Italy. It was a lovely romantic place. Maybe I can go back there,” she said wistfully, then cleared her throat. “Or I could go somewhere I’ve never been to before. The possibilities are endless.”

“Yes, they are,” Rebecca agreed. The look on her aunt’s face was curious, but Rebecca knew her well enough to leave it alone for now. “I’m happy you’re here for the holidays!” she announced jubilantly. “I bet I could get Ellie to bake you something special to celebrate this monumental occasion!”

“Girl, anything Ellie bakes is special. The *real* question is, will I ever be invited to one of the infamous Girls’ nights?”

“I’m sure I can secure you a permanent invite,” Rebecca said with a bright smile.

“Wait! I’m *married* to you, and I’ve only been to *one* of those things! Why don’t I get a permanent invite?”

“Because, my love, no significant others are allowed.” Rebecca eyed her aunt. “Did you follow some dude here? Or some lady?” she asked cheekily.

Willamena laughed. “Absolutely not. In fact, I left some *dude* in New York.”

Cass slipped out of the chair, her butt thumping to the floor. “Do tell!”

Aunt Wills shook her head. “I do not kiss and tell.”

“Everyone you talk to kisses and tells you!” Cass countered.

“That’s my job.” Both Rebecca and Cass stared at her expectantly. “Oh, come now. You’re not interested in the love life of some old woman.”

“You’re not old,” the couple said together.

“Spill it,” Rebecca ordered.

Willamena sighed. “His name is Richard. We’ve had a thing for a while. Now we don’t. I may be in my fifties, but it was time for me to grow up when it came to relationships. That being said, I’m not interested in finding romance right now. I’m interested in finding me.”

“What if finding yourself means finding that all this time, all you needed was the love of a woman?” Cass wiggled her eyebrows suggestively and earned a playful slap from her wife.

“Anything is possible,” Willamena said nonchalantly. “Now, I’m starving. I think I’ll go to Ellie’s Diner. I’ve been craving her food since I left the last time.” She stood, smirking at the dropped jaws of her nieces. “If you’re joining me, I’d suggest a different attire than what you’re currently wearing.”

ELLIE'S DINER

Willamena took a long, deep breath the moment she walked into Ellie's Diner. Oh, that aroma. She could get used to smelling the sweetness of pies, the heartiness of bacon, and the strength of coffee every day. Of course, she would most likely gain a ton of weight, but Willamena was beyond caring about that. Everything in this diner was too good to pass up.

"I've missed this so much."

Rebecca bumped her aunt's hip as she passed by. "You're holding up the line, woman. I need my Ellie coffee."

Cass slipped by a still basking Willamena. "I think she missed this place more than us," she muttered crankily to her wife.

"Aww, it's okay, baby. I still love you more than Ellie's food."

Cass grinned goofily. "Thanks, babe!"

"Willamena!" Ellie exclaimed, blowing right past Rebecca and Cass to hug the older woman. "What a wonderful surprise!"

"Hello, my dear Ellie." She held Ellie at arm's length, eyeing her with a doctor's eye. "How are you doing?"

Ellie smiled, kindly. "I'm nearly 100%. I'm running again, much to Hunter's dismay. Not because she thinks I'm not ready, but because she insists on running with me, and she's constantly trying to keep my pace."

“Wuss,” Cass snorted.

“How about you, Cass? Would you like to run with me? I’m training for a marathon . . .”

That’s as far as Ellie got before Cass was bowing out and asking for a large glass of chocolate milk.

“Your diner is beautifully festive, Ellie,” Willamena stated with awe as she looked around the winter wonderland. The weather outside may not produce a Christmas vibe there in Los Angeles, especially compared to New York, but Ellie hadn’t let that stop her from bringing the spirit inside.

“Thank you.” Ellie ushered them to Rebecca and Cass’s regular booth. “Jessie and Hunter are crazy about Christmas, and we want to make up for all the real Christmases that Dani and Claire have missed together. I’m just trying to make it perfect for them,” she winked. “Is that why you’re here? For the holidays?”

“Nope, she’s moving here!” Cass answered before Willamena could open her mouth. “Sorry,” she muttered when Rebecca raised a brow. “I’m just excited. And really hungry.”

“Got it,” Ellie chuckled. “Food first, then catching up. But I want to hear all about you moving here! So, what can I get everyone?”

“The Cass Special!” Cass blurted out with a proud grin. “I have my own special,” she unnecessarily explained to Aunt Wills.

“What does the Cass Special entail?” Wills asked cautiously. She was hungry, but she didn’t think she’d ever be “Cass hungry.”

“Well, let’s see,” Ellie tapped her chin. “There are waffles, pancakes, and french toast. Four whole eggs and four egg whites scrambled. Four pieces of bacon, two sausage links, and hash

browns. She'll wash it all down with two, sometimes three glasses of chocolate milk and a slice of pie. Flavor to be determined."

Willamena's jaw dropped. Where in the hell did Cass put all that food? Wills had seen Cass with little clothes on. She'd seen the muscles. Perhaps Cass and Rebecca were on to something with all the sex. Wills shook herself then. *That* was something she preferred not to think about.

"Oh, my. I think my arteries have seized up just listening to you. Since my metabolism has decided to take a nap, perhaps I should stick with avocado toast and *two* eggs, over easy. And a coffee, please."

"Make that two, please," Rebecca said politely. She was over trying to figure out how Cassidy could eat so much. As long as it kept Cassidy's stamina up, Rebecca was all for it.

"I'm on it! Oh, Willamena, I hope you'll be able to attend our Christmas party?" she asked expectantly.

"The last one was a hoot! And sentimental," Cass offered with a nostalgic smile.

"I wouldn't dream of missing this one," Willamena vowed. "Especially if baked goods are involved."

"Okay, now that Cassidy has food in her belly, fill us in on the details of your move here. Let's start with where this house is you bought."

"You know, you have always been bossy," Aunt Wills teased her niece. "Ever since you were a little girl, you've had that streak in you."

"That must be why she's so good at . . ."

“Cassidy.”

“Sorry, Mistress,” Cass murmured, then stuffed her smirking face with more pie.

“To answer your question, my dear niece, my place is close enough to you that we can easily visit. And far enough away where I won’t become a bother.”

“You could never be a bother, Aunt Wills. Even when you’re calling me bossy,” Rebecca winked.

“Fine, far enough away where I can’t hear anything that may erode my senses.” Willamena smiled wickedly at Rebecca.

“Yeah, I was wrong. You can be a bother.” Rebecca laughed when Willamena flicked a piece of pie crust at her. “Do you need help moving boxes? Did you sell your place in New York? Was this Richard guy just a fuck buddy?”

Cass nearly spit her pie out. “Babe!” she said with a full mouth.

“Inquiring minds want to know what my dear aunt has been up to all these years.”

“She’s just realized she’s upset with me,” Willamena explained to Cass. “Rebecca feels as though I have kept part of my life a secret from her.”

“You have,” Rebecca pouted.

“Honestly, dear, Richard was nothing to write home about. What did you call it once? A means to an end? A service?”

“Uh, maybe you two should discuss this without me around?” Cass suggested uncomfortably.

“Nonsense,” Willamena answered. “You’re part of the family. Besides, where Richard is concerned, the conversation is over. Had it been a significant relationship in my life, Rebecca, I would have told you. As for the other questions, I still have my place in New York. I’ll probably always call New York home, but I’ll now be based in LA. The place I bought is fully furnished, and I sent my essentials ahead.” She reached across the table and took her niece’s hand. “You feel cheated by my having a life beyond being your aunt.”

“Don’t shrink me, Aunt Wills. I’m adult enough to realize you have a life. I just wish this wasn’t one-sided. You need me to tell you everything, yet you keep your own book closed.”

Willamena frowned. “That’s not entirely. . . untrue.” Both Rebecca and Cass looked at Aunt Wills with shock. “Don’t look at me like that. With everything that you have been through, Rebecca, whatever happened in my life took a back seat. Once you were happy again, I guess I thought all those chapters of the past were better left unread.”

“What if I want to read them?” Rebecca asked quietly. “You’ve told me stories of mom when you and she were kids. You’ve told me about mom’s time in college and how she met dad. You’ve always told me everything there is to tell about my parents. But *you* became my parent when they passed away. I want to know who you were, too. Beyond being my aunt,” Rebecca repeated Willamena’s words.

Willamena studied her niece for a full minute. “Well, it’s a good thing I moved here, isn’t it? Though I will ask that you are patient with me. Right now, I’d like to get settled here in LA, go to the infamous Girls’ night holiday party, get smashed, and have some fun with my family. Can we do that?”

Rebecca smiled. “We can do that.”

TO BE CONTINUED. . .

Our favorite therapist is ready to party! Perhaps it's time for another Girls' Night Holiday Party! You never know what trouble these ladies can get into. . .