



A Novel of Sweet Tea
and Sensibility

JANE OF
Austin



HILLARY MANTON LODGE

Praise for
Jane of Austin

“Packed with charm, wit, and a thoroughly satisfying romance, *Jane of Austin* made me want to pick up and move myself down to Texas. Dear reader, put the kettle on, mix up some scones, and be the heroine of your book club by bringing *Jane* to this month’s meeting.”

—KIMBERLY STUART, author of the Heidi Elliott series
and *Sugar: A Novel*

“*Jane of Austin* offers readers a fresh and contemporary take on a beloved classic. What a delight to enjoy Austen in this new modern way and find the characters and story as approachable, relevant, and engaging as the classic that has captured our hearts and sensibility for more than two hundred years. Heroine Jane’s quirky brightness brings this rich tale of love, life, music, and tea to life—and leaves you yearning for more!”

—KATHERINE REAY, author of *Dear Mr. Knightley*
and *A Portrait of Emily Price*

“Quirky and charming, *Jane of Austin* goes down like a perfect cuppa. I was enchanted!”

—TERI WILSON, author of *Unleashing Mr. Darcy*,
now a Hallmark Channel original movie

“I love a story that I can savor, and this delicious charmer has it all—a swoon-worthy hero, unrequited love, quirky and loveable secondary characters, and a heroine you want to root for! (Not to mention many delicious recipes!) When tea-shop owner Jane and her sisters move to Austin looking for a new future, she has no idea that love is waiting for her too. The only problem is, she’ll have to get her heart broken to find it. Beautifully written, a keeper of a story, and the perfect beach read!”

—SUSAN MAY WARREN, *USA Today* best-selling, RITA
Award-winning author of the Montana Rescue series

“Tea and Texas make for a delicious reading recipe in Hillary Manton Lodge’s *Jane of Austin*! Hillary’s writing is seamless and sophisticated. I was charmed by everything I learned through this story about tea and tea making. And I was invested in the lives and loves of Jane and her sisters. I thoroughly enjoyed this tale of new beginnings, sisterhood, and healing.”

—BECKY WADE, author of *True to You*

“Hillary Manton Lodge’s modern twist on *Sense and Sensibility* will delight Jane Austen fans and contemporary romance fans alike. *Jane of Austin* is filled with warmth, wit, charm, and the kinds of unforgettable characters that will have you cheering some on and ready to wring the necks of others. I’m telling my friends to make it one of their summer must-reads!”

—KARA ISAAC, RITA Award–nominated author
of *Close To You*

JANE OF
AUSTIN

BOOKS BY HILLARY MANTON LODGE

A Table by the Window

Reservations for Two

Together at the Table

A light gray silhouette of a woman with short, dark, curly hair. She is facing away from the viewer. Her dress is depicted with a dark, stylized city skyline and splatters at the bottom.

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WATERBROOK

JANE OF AUSTIN

The characters and events in this book are fictional, and any resemblance to actual persons or events is coincidental.

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*In loving memory of Helen Law Rounds, my grandmother
and a great reader who loved Jane Austen best.*

1916–2016

Prologue

But indeed I would rather have nothing but tea.

—JANE AUSTEN

San Francisco, CA

2009

“Well, girls,” our father began, “it’s been a good run. And I’m not saying it won’t be again, but we’re going to have to . . . economize.”

“Economize?” I repeated, exchanging glances with my sister Celia, seated next to me, and our kid sister, Margot.

At least, I would have exchanged glances with Margot, but she was toying with the edge of her Powerpuff Girls Band-Aid.

The three of us sat together in a row on the sofa that had belonged to our grandmother. Everything in the old house seemed to have come from one family member or another.

Three years ago, Celia and I had sat on this same sofa when we were told about the car accident that ended our mother’s life. It was tragic and ironic all at once. Tragic because we’d lost our mother and because five-year-old Margot was in the hospital with scrapes and a cracked rib.

Ironic because our father had just been hired on as the CEO of a car company.

Since then, the house and its contents had felt more important. Dad had worked, as he usually did, but even though I was in college and Celia had just graduated, we remained at the grand old house on Pacific Avenue. Near to Margot; near to memories.

Dad's work responsibility had only increased over the last few years, what with being the CEO of Edison Motors, and while he and Celia had the finance and business world in common, they rarely discussed it. Neither did he and I discuss botany (my passion) or the finer points of Nickelodeon programming (Margot's current passion, which we hoped might develop into a love of film down the road). As it was, the three of us seldom saw him when his family man image wasn't in need of some spit and polish.

"Did something happen?" Celia asked. "At Edison?"

"In a manner of speaking," he hedged.

Celia and I both waited, silent. Margot folded her legs until she could rest her chin on her knees.

"I've been ousted by the board," he finally said, his words coming out in an awkward rush. "The recall and all that, well, they're shortsighted. Shortsighted and malicious, if you ask me."

My back straightened in alarm. "Malicious?"

"They set the SEC after me," he continued, his face drawn but resolute. "There were some accounting issues, and while that's not my responsibility, I'm the fall guy in their little corporate drama." He paused, wincing. "Things are going to be a little rough for a while, but it'll shake out. In the meantime, we're going to decamp."

"Decamp?" Celia asked, frowning, but it was the other word he'd used that gave me pause.

I leaned forward. "We? How do you mean?"

In most ways that mattered, our nuclear family had ended in the car accident. Dad worked, and Celia, Margot, and I looked out for each other. There hadn't been a *we* that included our father in our family for a very long time.

"Yes. My assets have been frozen, pending investigation."

"Frozen?" Celia squeaked out.

He nodded. "Frozen. And there are debts. At any rate, the house will be on the market shortly."

I jumped to my feet. "The house? You can't sell mom's house!"

Celia rose and tried to place a soothing hand on my arm, but I shook her off. “This house has been in the family for generations.”

Margot scowled. “It’s my house too.”

Dad lifted his chin. “It’s also worth a great deal of money, young lady. And it was our house, your mother’s and mine.”

“No!” I tried to fill my lungs with air. “You can’t sell it!”

My voice sounded strange to my own ears, sluggish and overloud. My face flushed in panic and embarrassment.

“There’s no discussion,” my father said, the calm in his voice only increasing the shame and anxiety knotted in my chest. “I’m leaving for the Caymans until the whole thing blows over.”

I narrowed my eyes. “But—aren’t your assets frozen?”

“The ones the SEC knows about,” he amended, waving a hand casually. “You know how it is.”

I didn’t, actually. But then, I was just a college student, not a CEO.

“What about me?” Margot demanded.

“You’ll come along,” he reassured her. “It’s sunny. You’ll like it. There are . . . boats. You like boats, don’t you?”

Margot’s lip curled with disgust. “I get seasick.”

“Is that even legal?” Celia asked. “Leaving the country?”

“It’s what my lawyer advised,” he answered, his chin lifting higher.

Celia and I exchanged dubious glances.

“And as I said, the three of you can come with me,” he said. “I’ll be able to access my offshore accounts.”

“But . . . we’re in school,” I said, working hard to keep my emotions in check. “Margot and I, anyway, and Celia just started her new job.” My brows knit together. “Next week is midterms.”

Celia nodded.

“We can’t just pick up and go to the Caymans,” I said. Even the words felt strange in my mouth.

“I hate school,” Margot said, sitting up. “I’ll go.”

Celia shook her head. "You have to stay in school. And you'd miss your friends, wouldn't you? Isabelle and Kaitlyn?"

Margot conceded with a shrug.

"If you stay here," Dad said, his voice stern, "I won't be able to pay for your tuition. I won't be able to pay for your dance classes, either," he said, looking at Margot. "The money you have is the money you'll have, until the rest of you turn twenty-one and can access your trust funds, the way Celia has. Because those were set up by your mother and grandparents, the government can't touch them."

I swallowed, fighting to keep the panic down.

"Nothing has to be decided tonight," Dad said. "Think about it. Take your time."

Celia nodded.

"I'll need your answer the day after tomorrow though," he finished, "in order to secure plane tickets."

I spared a glance at Celia, my mind churning. She said nothing, and we dispersed shortly after for bed.

The next morning, the *San Francisco Chronicle's* front-page above-fold headline featured our father. I snuck the paper off the front steps and read it in the privacy of the upstairs library.

Most of it sounded like what our father had described, but other words jumped out as well. *Fraud* and *embezzlement* being the most notable.

He'd assured us everything had been a mistake, but . . . but had it?

Beneath the fold was a picture of Dad and Celia. Sure, her back was turned, but it still listed her by name. I wasn't an expert in the field, but I didn't think that was a good thing for Celia.

By the end of the day, my fears came true.

"They let me go," she said, her face pale and shocked. More shocked, somehow, than after Dad's news the previous day.

"There's no way to fight it?" I asked, my voice low as we sat together on the unfashionable yet blissfully comfortable sofa stashed in our favorite attic nook.

She shook her head. "No. I mean, I could. But what if it didn't work out? You saw the paper. I'm"—she sniffed—"unemployable. In finance, trust is *everything*."

I wrapped my arm around her shoulders and held tight. "I'm so sorry."

"I had to take my stuff out and everything."

"Did they give you severance?"

She nodded. "If I agreed to go quietly."

And she would. Anyone who knew Celia would know that.

She sniffed and laughed. "The only bright side is that I think I have a date."

"What?"

"It's a coworker. He was hired on the same time as me. Teddy Foster. He helped me put my stuff together, gave me his briefcase so that I didn't have to do a walk of shame with a cardboard box. Walked out with me so it just looked like we were leaving for a meeting."

"And then he asked you out?"

She laughed again, disbelieving. "I think so. He asked for my phone number."

"Did he text?"

A nod.

I laughed and shook my head in disbelief. "Look at you. Getting fired and getting a date, all in the same day."

"You can laugh, but it won't be funny for long. Not—not with everything else. I needed that job. Nobody else is going to hire me."

"I know," I said. "I have a plan. Well, it's the beginnings of a plan." I held out my hand, preparing to count off with my fingers. "First, I quit school."

"Jane, no!"

"Yes. My trust fund won't kick in for another two years, and yours won't cover my tuition and Margot's—and rent. So I'm going to quit school, and we're going to start a business."

"A business? Jane, be serious."

"I am being serious! You'll work your magic and open a shell corporation, and we'll use it to get a lease. Nobody will know it's the infamous Woodward sisters. We'll get a lease, open a shop, and . . . I don't know, sell soap."

Celia goggled at me. "Shell corporation? Soap?"

"I *have* learned a few things listening to you and Dad over the years. But it doesn't have to be soap. We could sell, I don't know . . . antiques. You love antiques."

"I know nothing about antiques."

I racked my brain for ideas. "Tea. A tea shop. I learned all about tea when I was studying abroad."

"I know," she said dryly. "It's all you've been talking about. And why I want you in school—you and botany."

"I'll finish school later. This is an emergency."

Celia sighed. "What's sad is that I know you're not being hyperbolic." She pulled her chunky cardigan closer. "A tea shop?"

"A tea shop. Something quaint, tourist-friendly."

"You hate tourists."

"Desperate times." I met her gaze. "Dad taking Margot to the Caymans is a terrible idea."

Celia winced. "I know. But I want what's best for her, and . . ."

"It's not her fleeing the country with Dad," I said firmly. "She needs us. We need her."

Celia hugged her arms to herself. "A tea shop?"

I nodded, my mind full of tea leaves and steaming water. "A tea shop."

"Small business ownership is hard. Most small businesses go under in the first year."

"But it's us! You and me. Your brains, my winning personality—"

Celia said nothing, but her raised eyebrow filled the silence.

"Okay, fine," I conceded. "Your brains, *your* winning personality, and my expertise in the kitchen."

She gave a rueful laugh. "That sounds more plausible. I just—I don't know."

"Do you have any other ideas? We can't let Margot go. We . . . we almost lost her once."

My eyes began to fill with tears; Celia reached to hold my hand tight.

"You're right," she said, her voice steadier. "If she wants to stay, we'll find a way to make it work."

1

You can never get a cup of tea large enough or a book
long enough to suit me.

—C. S. LEWIS

December 2016
San Francisco, CA

“So you see,” Jonathan explained, “what you’ve been paying as a lease for your little tea shop—it’s well beneath market value.”

“I’m aware of that,” I said, though until now I hadn’t known *quite* how far below. I hadn’t had to. But I didn’t let on; I didn’t like the condescending tone of our landlord’s nephew’s voice.

Well, ex-landlord. Because the owner of our building, Atticus, had passed away the week before. Atticus had passed, and there was no way we could pay his nephew the number on the paper in front of us.

“You’ve been leasing the space for six years now?”

“Seven,” Celia corrected softly.

“Right. And the market, you know, has increased in the area exponentially. Which was fine for my uncle, but for myself as a businessman . . .” His voice trailed off, leaving us to infer his thoughts on not exponentially increasing our rent.

“Do you think,” my sister Celia asked carefully, “that there could be some room for negotiation?”

“Well,” Jonathan started. But his wife, Phoebe, laid her hand over his to stop the flow of words.

“My uncle-in-law was quite the philanthropist,” Phoebe said, drawing out

the last word. "But the recession is over." She smiled, or at least gave her best facsimile of a smile. "Our son's tuition won't pay for itself."

I opened my mouth to protest, but Celia kicked my foot and shook her head slightly. I looked out the office window and counted to fifty.

Backward.

If Celia didn't want me to point out that Jonathan and Phoebe's son was all of three years old, I wouldn't. If she didn't want me to remind Jonathan that since he'd inherited his uncle's real estate holdings, we could use the tea salon space for free and he'd hardly miss a penny, fine. We were hardly standing between his son and whatever lower-tier private university Jonathan Junior wouldn't attend for another fifteen years, and everybody in the room knew it.

"You could speak to your father," Jonathan suggested.

My hands clenched into fists.

Celia spoke first, saving me from trying to string together a civil sentence. "We've chosen to keep our business interests completely separate from our father, thank you."

Phoebe's smile edged into a smirk. "That's probably for the best."

I rose to my feet, struggling to remain calm. "We'll be out in the thirty days stipulated in our lease agreement." It would be a thin, sad holiday season, but at least we could spend it at our home before relocating.

Jonathan clapped his hands. "Excellent. You'll find something else; I'm sure of it."

I wasn't but didn't say anything.

"Could you make it fifteen?" Phoebe asked.

My spine straightened. "Excuse me?"

"Jon's uncle simply rented without making improvements to his properties, and many of them need major repair and updating. I have a list of clients waiting to look at the space," Phoebe continued. "The remodels will have to be completed before they see it."

"Fifteen days," I said, barely controlling my temper, "is Christmas Eve."

“Oh,” Phoebe said. “I hadn’t realized. I apologize. How about twenty?” She clasped her hands together and gave us a benevolent smile. “Start the new year somewhere fresh.”

“Twenty is fine,” Celia answered quickly, before I could tell Phoebe where she could shove her fresh new year. “Thank you.”

And before I could say another word, she grabbed my hand and dragged me from the office.

We stayed silent as we walked down the hallway, but once the elevator doors closed, I whirled to face my sister. “What were you doing, agreeing to twenty days? What they’re asking is illegal!”

“Of course it is, Jane.” Celia pressed the *L* button to take us back to ground level. “But you and I both know that they can make life miserable for us if we disagree, and we can’t afford a legal battle.”

“It wouldn’t come to that. You’re dating Phoebe’s brother; she wouldn’t take it to court. Speaking of, does Teddy know about this?”

“He would have told me if he’d known. We’ll figure it out.”

I faced the elevator doors and crossed my arms. “I don’t like it. I don’t know how we’re going to get the three of us *and* the business moved out in twenty days. And”—my anger redoubled—“the building *isn’t* out of repair.”

“I know,” she sighed.

“How are we going to tell Margot that Christmas just got canceled?”

“It’s not canceled, just . . .”

“We can take a break from packing,” I said dryly, “to hold hands and sing carols. That’s our very-best-case scenario. Let’s not pretend it’s a good one.”

Celia sighed again.

I shook my head. “We’re Valencia Street Tea. What are we going to do if we’re not on Valencia Street anymore?”

“I suppose we’ll just be Valencia Tea. Or something.”

I wrinkled my nose. “Mmm. I like Valencia Tea Company better.”

“That’s perfectly fine.”

My stomach twisted with the thought, though. “Are you sure you couldn’t say something? To Teddy?”

Celia lifted a resigned shoulder. “Phoebe’s always gotten her way. If she says jump, he jumps. And tries not to get hit.”

“But he—”

“No,” Celia said.

I scowled and leaned against the mirrored elevator wall. “You’ve been seeing each other for how long? The two of you are practically engaged.”

“His hands are full enough at work; he doesn’t need to get tangled up with Jonathan and Phoebe’s issues.”

“Atticus would be horrified.” I shook my head. “I took his favorite scones to the memorial.”

Celia sighed. “You’re right. He would be shocked.”

I tried to take a deep breath, but it came out ragged. “How are we going to find another space in twenty days,” I asked, quieter, “much less move? What about the tea plants? And Margot?”

“I won’t tell her you thought of the tea plants first.” Celia’s mouth settled into a firm line. “We’ll figure something out.”



For the last seven years, we’d leased the downstairs of the row house—not Victorian, like the Painted Ladies, but built after the 1906 earthquake. Diverse and eclectic, our neighborhood on Valencia Street had gentrified over the years, with shops and restaurants springing up around us.

The upstairs of the house had been remodeled into an apartment, and when the tenants left three years ago, Atticus had offered it to the three of us. We’d been living on borrowed time, I now realized. Atticus didn’t raise our rates as the neighborhood changed, always telling us that he valued us and our tea shop.

In exchange, we kept him in tea and all the scones he could ever desire. The arrangement pleased us all—our old apartment had been cramped and a

longer commute for Margot to get to ballet. After we moved in upstairs, she'd been able to walk to school and back, take BART to ballet, and have her homework supervised by Atticus in exchange for company and croissants.

Having the second floor also meant I had room for a secondhand piano and access to the rooftop, which is where I grew my personal tea plants.

The tea plants, like all *camellia sinensis* plants, grew slowly. I harvested them occasionally for our personal use and practiced making white, green, and black tea from the leaves, but I wouldn't be able to use them on a commercial basis until I had more mature plants. Atticus had treasured my tea, and I'd always set aside the best of the harvest for him.

Atticus's death meant that those days were now at an end. Our home, our business, and my plants—all would need to relocate.

"Maybe we won't have to move far," I said to Celia upon returning home. "We can go inland. Pleasant Hill, Walnut Creek . . ."

"Maybe," Celia answered.

Margot wouldn't like it, but neither of us would say so. As a junior in high school, Margot would likely find a move to the farther-flung burbs a fate worse than death.

"When is Teddy picking you up tonight?" I asked, reaching for something positive in my mind.

"When he gets off work, so . . . around eight or so."

I squeezed her hand. "Maybe he'll have a brilliant idea."

"That would be nice," Celia agreed.

We found Margot on the balcony, practicing her dancing and using the rail as a bar. Celia gestured her to the small kitchen table, and the three of us sat down.

"We're going to have to move, aren't we?" she asked, her face resolved. "Because Atticus died?"

"Yes," Celia said. "But we'll find something else."

"I saw a For Rent sign two blocks over," she offered.

"Oh," Celia nodded. "Good. I'll look into it."

I knew my older sister. She would look, just as promised. But if the owners wanted what Jonathan and Phoebe wanted, there was absolutely no way we'd be able to afford it.

"We should start packing," I told Margot. "Even if we don't know where we'll land yet, we can still get ready."

She wrinkled her nose, but nodded.

Margot and I spent the evening in our apartment; the two of us made a pile of items that needed to be put away and another pile to be donated. I was asleep on the sofa when Celia returned later that night; Margot had long since retreated to message friends from the privacy of her room.

"Did you have a good time?" I asked, though the rosy glow in her cheeks gave away the answer. "Did he have any genius ideas?"

The glow faded, just a little. "No," she said, removing her jacket before taking a seat beside me. "But he does hope we find somewhere nice and close by."

"He doesn't think he can influence Phoebe?"

"Phoebe is un-influenceable."

"I highly doubt that, for a series of reasons it would be petty to mention."

The corner of Celia's mouth turned up in a smile. "No?"

"Also, I'm tired."

"That makes more sense."

"It is strange, when you think about it, that we're being evicted by your boyfriend's sister and her husband."

Celia sighed. "Not evicted, exactly, but I know what you mean, and yes. But don't worry. We'll start looking for new places tomorrow."



Every night, Celia closed out the till and we examined the numbers.

We had a little money, but not enough.

When I turned twenty-one, I gained control of my trust fund. My mother's family had money, but not limitless wealth. The fund meant we had enough to pay off debts and tuck an appropriate amount into an emergency

fund. The rest went into long-term investments to ensure that Margot could go to college. At the time we'd toyed with trying to buy a location rather than lease, but even then the price of purchasing property in the city was simply out of our reach.

Certainly, we couldn't afford a place that could compare to where we were, especially after moving into the second-floor apartment.

With the investment money inaccessible, we had enough to keep the business going, to keep Margot in toe shoes, to make sure we all had medical coverage. Over the years, we'd gotten good at creatively making ends meet.

But the more we looked for a new space for Valencia Tea and a new growing space for the tea plants, the more my worries became real.

We'd had no luck finding anything in any of the adjacent neighborhoods; the For Rent sign had disappeared by the time Celia set out to inquire. Nothing across town, and so far Celia had been reluctant to examine the farther-flung suburbs, wanting to stay close for Teddy and Margot's school, no doubt.

I just worried that close wouldn't remain an option.

On day seven, we holed up after hours in the shop with the Oh Hellos playing over the speakers.

"Maybe if we tried something new with the Internet business," I suggested as I wrapped yet another teapot up with packing wrap and placed it in a box. "Like a tea subscription box. Right now, most of our sales are local, but that kind of hook could take us national. Or maybe we do a pop-up shop from time to time or a food cart. What do you think of that?"

"We could," Celia answered, looking up from packing her frilliest teacup. "But we make good money off the pastries. I'd want us to come back to this model. And I'd miss all this—the cups, the customers. This place has been special."

I looked around at the space, with its original windows and vintage wallpaper. "It has."

A rap sounded at the door behind me. "We're closed!" I called without looking up.

"Just me," came a familiar male voice.

"Teddy!" Celia set her packing aside and jumped up to unlock the door and let him inside.

He'd obviously come from work, his suit perfectly cut but a little rumpled from the day's wear. He and Celia looked good together, like a Zales diamond ad. His hair was dark, like Phoebe's, but where Phoebe's was viciously straight, his was thick with a bit of curl.

Speaking of diamonds, I wondered—and not for the first time—when he'd get around to putting a ring on it. After all, they'd been together for ages.

"Sorry about leaving you in the cold, Teds," I said, sitting up and taking notice of the bags in his hands. "Whatcha got there?"

"I brought Indian," he said, lifting a plastic bag full of containers.

Celia gave him a chaste peck on the cheek. "You're so sweet."

"I'll get plates!" I called out. "What's in there?"

He began to pull plastic tubs of curry out, one by one. "Lamb *rogan josh*, chicken *tikka masala*, *baingan bharta*, and dal curry."

I cocked my head to the side. "But what will the rest of you eat?"

Teddy gave a warm laugh. "There's *palak paneer* too and samosas for Margot. Is she upstairs?"

"Only until the scent of food finds her nose."

Sure enough, seconds later Margot's head, surrounded by a soft halo of curls that had escaped her ballerina bun, appeared in the doorway. "Teddy! You're here!" Her eyes lit on the food on the table. "And you brought Indian!" She looked up at him, her large dark eyes hopeful. "Did you get samosas?"

He lifted the brown paper bag. "Just for you."

She threw her arms around his middle in an impetuous, classically Margot hug. "You're the best."

The four of us set up the containers at one of the café tables and filled our plates with rice, naan, curries, and samosas. As we ate, I looked around at the tea shop, struck by the realization that we wouldn't be here, in this space, much longer.

After everything that had happened, Valencia Street Tea had become our home. It had provided a living for the three of us, a rewarding one that provided us the flexibility to take care of Margot.

And while I'd taken a class here and there, working toward finishing my degree, this home had given me the space to lean into one of the great loves of my life—tea. Here, I had space not only to grow my own tea but also reason to buy bulk tea and mix it with herbs, citrus peels, or flower buds to create my own specialty flavors. I loved experimenting with those blends, not just to brew as tea but to season food.

All this I could have done on my own, without the restaurant part of the tea salon, but that was Celia's favorite part. Aside from keeping the books, she'd left the world of finance behind, embracing the hospitality side of running a tea shop. She loved serving tea in her eclectic collection of teapots and teacups, loved serving shortbreads and pound cakes, loved meeting customers and hearing about their day.

Every single good Internet review mentioned Celia, usually by name. The few bad ones?

I believe one former customer referred to me as a "termagant," which if memory served me was actually code for "someone who will insist on people keeping their hands out of the loose-leaf tea jars, thank you very much."

Margot sighed contentment as she ate. "I don't want to leave," she said. "I want to stay here forever, eating Indian takeout with Teddy."

"We'll find something close," I said, sounding more confident than I felt. "Close to our customers. Close to Teddy." I passed the container of rich green *palak paneer* to Celia. "I promise."



On day ten, Phoebe called. "I'm going to come in," she said, "to take some measurements. Could you or your sister unlock the door for me?"

"It's open," I said.

"Oh," she said, surprised. "You're still open?"

I looked around the dining room at the regulars clustered around tables and bit back a dozen sarcastic retorts. “Yes, we are,” I said instead.

“Do you have any of those green-tea macarons?”

“The matcha macarons?” I reached into our pastry case and removed the tray. “No, I don’t believe I see any in the case.”

Phoebe made a noise of disappointment and hung up. I set the phone down and raised the tray. “Matcha macarons, anyone? They’re on the house.”

Within seconds, the macarons were gone.

“I can’t believe you’re leaving,” one of the customers said. “And over the holidays, no less. You’re Valencia Street Tea. You belong here; it’s in the name. You’re an institution.”

I gave a sad, wry smile. “We’ve only been here since 2010.”

“In this neighborhood? Institution.”

I smiled a thank-you and put on a brave face, knowing that Phoebe could walk in at any moment.

“It’s just so dated in here,” Phoebe said with a sigh after her arrival, as if the vintage interior made her tired.

I watched as Phoebe took in the original paned windows, the floral wallpaper, the crown molding, and tiled stone floors. If I could have taken the lot of it with us, I would have. I loved our tea salon, from the sign on the front to the potted plant in the back, and my heart broke at the thought of what she might do to it.

“Yes,” she said finally. “A lift is just what it needs.”

I physically clamped my tongue between my teeth.

Her vulture-like gaze swung to the bar, and her eyes lit up. “That’s nice though,” she said. “That can stay.”

“Actually,” Celia said, coming up behind me, “the bar is ours.”

Phoebe’s eyebrows, which managed to be at once massive and manicured, furrowed low over her eyes. “What’s that?”

“The bar,” Celia repeated, placing a hand over the marble top. “We bought it on craigslist.”

Phoebe considered this information.

I knew why she wanted it. Even if she wanted to turn the row house's interior to something minimalist and Scandinavian, the bar was something special. A solid wood base, with scrolling and flowers carved into the richly finished wood, and a thick marble top.

"Are you sure?" Phoebe asked, her head tilted with considered consideration.

"Our accountant has a copy of the receipt," Celia replied sweetly.

Sweetly, but with a hint of steel. My sister was nobody's dummy.

"It will be very heavy to take with you," Phoebe pointed out.

"I've been working out," I deadpanned. "And my baby sister, Margot, is a ballerina. Calves of steel, that one."

Celia snorted, but being refined and ladylike, she covered it with the gentlest of coughs.

Phoebe sighed. "It's just as well. You'll be out on the twenty-ninth as we discussed, yes? I have workmen coming to replace the windows."

"The windows?" I repeated, dumbly.

"Your energy bills must be sky high with these things," she said, reaching out and tapping the paned glass.

"We boil a lot of water here," I said. "It helps."

"I suppose." Phoebe looked the place over and sniffed. "It'll be a lot of work," she said, "but so rewarding it in the end."

One of the customers asked something of Celia, and she stepped over to assist.

I reached for a rag to wipe down the bar top and changed the subject. "We've enjoyed getting to know Teddy over the years," I said to Phoebe as I cleaned the crumbs and tea spills from its surface. "I never had a brother, so it's been fun having him around."

Phoebe's expression turned smug. "Both of my brothers *are* special: Rob with his app start-up and Teddy with his success at the firm. He's up for partner, you know."

I nodded. "I do."

"He has a bright future ahead of him. Our parents have high hopes for his career, you know."

My mouth quirked into a wry smile. "How Camelot of them."

"With his skills, his family connections, Teddy—Theodore, I should say—could go far."

"Yes," I said. "It's too bad he's not doing anything with his life."

I was being sarcastic, but Phoebe didn't catch it. "He should have been made partner last year," she said, and as much as I disliked her, I could read the sisterly anxiety on her face. "Everyone said he would be."

That I hadn't heard. "Oh?"

She lifted a shoulder. "This year should be the year. As long as the firm can overlook . . . you know."

"I don't."

"You know," she said, searching for words. "The . . . association."

I squinted. "The mob, you mean?"

"No!" She huffed out a sigh. "The association. With your father. Where is he?"

"We don't speak much," I said. "He travels. I'm not sure where he is." I tried to be casual, but something cold lodged within my chest. Dad had enjoyed his extended vacation in a variety of nonextradition nations over the years.

"At any rate," I said, "I don't see why my father should be a factor. We have very little contact with him, and he's never met Teddy."

"Doesn't matter. The name, you know."

I wished she'd stop saying that I knew. I didn't. At least, I hadn't, but this time I was getting a very bad feeling that perhaps I did.

"You're saying that Teddy's been passed up for partner because he's dating my sister."

Phoebe released a breath, looking grateful that she didn't have to be the one to say it out loud. "Yes, exactly. It's not her fault. But the association . . ."

I was beginning to hate that word.

But what did it matter? Teddy? Being manipulated by his work, his family? Giving up Celia?

He would never.

I met Phoebe's gaze. "Yes, well, shame that Teddy's never given a dry tea leaf about our father."

Celia returned, a cautious smile on her face as she took in both of our expressions. "Could I offer you a cup of tea while you're here, Phoebe?" Celia asked.



On days eleven through thirteen, we met with banks. We applied for loans and looked for anything that would give us the liquid cash to see us into a space within the city.

The experience reminded us why we'd opened the tea shop through a shell corporation in the first place.

After Dad left the country eight years ago, the name Woodward was splashed across every Bay Area newspaper as investigators and journalists worked to figure out if our father was corrupt or merely inept. To this day, nobody could be sure. The Valencia Street Tea gamble had, until now, provided a fairly stable living. Dad had offered to send us money now and again, but we'd declined. Sure, we'd had our lean years, but we were together, the three of us, and that was all that mattered.

But memories in this town ran long, and no bank wanted to give Walter Woodward's daughters a loan.

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