

Vintage

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Part One

“Today is a red lipstick kind of day”—Iris thought to herself while placing her hair in a high pony. She thought the denim scrunchie that she chose—would pair nicely with her lip color of choice. As she carefully lined her lips—she bopped her shoulders to the 90’s music that filled her apartment. “I don’t wannaaaaaa”—she sang while sorting through her lipstick collection. Her singing wasn’t the best—but she was having fun anyhow.

“I wonder what time he’s going to call?”—Iris said aloud—while turning on her boob tube television. She sorted through her VHS collection—and placed a tape into the built-in VCR. Iris was excited about her date—but anxious—and not hearing from him yet, had her on pins and needles.

Wanting to distract herself—she picked up her Polaroid camera—and took a picture, a selfie of some sort. She had scored the dated camera at a local thrift store—and felt like it was the best ten dollars she had ever spent. As she shook the film—wishing it would hurry up and develop—her phone played the familiar text tone. “Finally”—she thought to herself.

“Hey, wanna meet at the café on 33rd around six?”—the message read. Iris blushed. If he looked anything like his dating profile pics—she knew the date would go well. She waited ten minutes before responding—dating etiquette she read in an online magazine. “Sure. See you then”—she quickly typed—after the ten minutes passed.

Iris slipped into her leather espadrilles—her shoe of choice during the spring. Did a quick once over in the mirror—and removed her bike from her DIY wall rack.

As she pedaled toward 33rd—she hummed the song that filled her apartment—an hour prior. The mixture of the air—her outfit of choice—and the smell of spring—had her in an euphoric mood.

Iris locked her bike up—checked the time on her thrifted gold watch—and realized she had fifteen minutes to spare. Wanting to arrive before her date had gotten there—she decided to go inside and grab a table.

Iris toyed with her phone—which she only used for dating apps, emails, text messages—sometimes calls—and glanced toward the display of the café’s pastry offerings. The time was now 5:56 PM—and she was beginning to get anxious.

Time ticked on—and Iris hadn’t noticed that diners who came after her were now leaving. It was 6:45 PM—and he still hadn’t shown. “I wonder where he is?”—she thought to herself while turning over her phone. He hadn’t messaged. Or called.

Iris knew that online dating was a gamble—but she remained optimistic through it all.

She saw the digits change on her watch—it was now 7:00. Realizing that he wasn’t going to show—she decided to leave—but not before grabbing a slice of cake before cycling home.

Iris walked into her loft-styled apartment—hung her bike on the rack—and plopped down onto the sofa. “Why hadn’t he shown?”—“Should I have texted back faster?”—“Slower?”—she decided that it didn’t matter. “That’s life”, she shrugged—and ate cake—literally and figuratively—for dinner that night.

The next morning—Iris decided to get dressed and take herself to brunch. Not one to sulk—she figured she would date herself until she found the one. As she placed her hair into a messy bun—and decided to forgo her contacts—she considered buying a new pair of frames. In the middle of searching for eyeglass stores—a notification popped up on her screen. Someone had super liked her. She hurriedly exited the internet search—and entered the app.

“Oh my gosh!”—she exclaimed. Her admirer—was handsome—no, he was more than that. He was making her flustered—from his pictures, alone.

She quickly messaged him—and played it cool by typing, “Hey”. He quickly messaged back. Forgoing the column’s advice on the ten-minute wait—Iris eagerly replied—in seconds. And before she knew it—they had a date planned—for that night.

Feeling optimistic—and hoping that this date would go well—Iris decided to forgo her bike ride and walk to the restaurant for brunch.

After placing her order—she pondered what she should wear. She knew that she shouldn’t repeat an outfit—and wanted to get good wear out of her denim overall shorts. Deciding that she would pair them with a white—no, blush-toned crop top—and leather espadrilles—she was excited to finish her açai bowl and grabbed her waffles to go.

Iris walked at a brisk pace—and decided to jog up the stairs to her apartment. She wasn’t anxious as much as she was excited about her date.

“We still on for tonight? Eight?”—the message read. Iris decided not to make her previous mistake in response time—and quickly responded, “Yes! See you soon!”.

Usually, one for a high pony or messy bun—Iris decided to wear her hair down. Although frizzy—she appreciated how much her bob had grown. After a little—a lot—of mouse—and a homemade oil concoction—her hair looked date night ready.

She put on a pair of gold hoops—another red lip—and finally decided to try the cruelty-free makeup she purchased on a whim. “I look hot!”—she exclaimed while taking in her reflection. And she was right—she did.

Iris was on cloud nine. And her head—as it always was—was in the clouds. She felt optimistic. Hopeful. And most of all—eager to meet the guy who super liked her—on the dating app that she was so close to uninstalling.

Feeling adventurous—she chose to Uber to the bar they agreed to meet. Usually one for cycling or walking—and the occasional train ride—she surprised herself that she was going against her ideology of aiding to the pollution of the environment.

As the Prius pulled up to the bar—Iris noticed a man waiting outside. And after squinting a little—she noticed—it was him.

He looked even better in person. He was taller than she envisioned. His hair—medium length—but neat. The beanie he wore matched his wide-legged jeans perfectly. And his loose fit tee paired well with his high top sneakers. Iris started to feel shy—an emotion she wasn’t used to. She glanced at her reflection in the car’s rearview mirror—and noticed that she was blushing. And she hadn’t even formally introduced herself yet.

Iris exited the Prius—and after waiting on the cars to pass—she crossed the street. “Hey, you’re early!”—she smiled while joining him where he stood. “And so are you!”—he smiled—his teeth were the brightest shade of white she had ever seen. And his smile—

“So, you ready to head inside?”—he asked. Iris nodded her head as he opened the door.

“Yup—just us”—he notified the bartender. Because it was a Saturday night—the restaurant was packed—and the two decided to sit at the bar.

“So—how was your day?”—he asked while they waited to place their drink orders. Iris wanted to tell him about her brunch—the nostalgia she felt from the movie she watched while impatiently waiting to get dressed—but she simply responded—“It was cool. How about you?”.

“My day—well, let’s just say. I might be ordering a couple of drinks”, he laughed. Iris giggled—an emotion that she was rather familiar with.

Through the entire date—Iris noticed how he kept his attention on her. He appeared to be really interested in what she had to say. He seemed to really think it was cool that she worked for a consignment shop. And in turn, she thought his job at a tea store was really neat. She loved tea—

and if things went well she hoped he would spend many evenings preparing fancy drinks just for two.

“Brent—I really enjoyed this. I mean. This was an amazing night”—Iris led with while they walked outside. “I did too. I’m glad you saw the importance of modern technology—or else, I wouldn’t have met such an amazing woman”—he smiled. Iris grinned—she was happy that she had also chosen to incorporate some aspects of present trends into her life. “Wait—before we say goodnight—you really have an old school tv? And you had a flip phone—for how long?”—he laughed. “I would pay money to see that”. On-trend with her feeling of adventure—she quickly responded—“How about tonight?”. Brent caught the message—and they Uber’d to her apartment—together.

“This is me”—she smiled as she opened the door. “—This is you”, Brent smiled in return. “This is a really nice place—in Brooklyn too? How’s the rent?”. Iris didn’t want to tell her date that her parents had purchased the building fifteen years ago—she wanted to appear a little more mature than that. “It’s doable”—she vaguely replied. “Drink?”. Brent nodded his head while running his fingers along the brick wall.

“You weren’t kidding—you literally have a boob tube”—he laughed. “I told you—and look”—she replied while handing him a beer from a local brewery—“Feast your eyes on that collection of movies”. Brent placed his beer on the coffee table—and sat on the floor. “This is—wow”, he couldn’t believe that she had over a hundred thrifted tapes. “This is incredible, how long did it take you to build this collection?”—he asked while reading the box of a movie he hadn’t seen yet. Iris had a seat on her couch—and traced the rim of the bottle—“Um, maybe about two years. During my many thrifting trips, I always make sure to purchase a few VHS”. “Cool—I mean, totally cool”—he replied while joining her on the sofa. “Find anything you wanted to watch?”—she asked while noticing the tape still in his hand. “This?”—he shrugged. “Great pick”, she smiled.

Iris knew that he would have to rewatch the movie—because they spent the entire running time, talking. “So, tell me. What other modern things do you not agree with?”—he asked—now on his second beer. “Well”—she started—“I don’t believe in just dating, I believe in marriage. I always bicycle or walk—and on the rare occasion I’ll Uber or take the MTA”. She paused. “I thrift all of my clothing—my furniture—and if it wasn’t for my job needing to e-mail me—I would still have a flip phone”. “Pretentious I see”, he laughed. His comment caught her off guard—“Wait, what do you mean?”. She knew the definition of the word—but had no idea why he had said it in reference to her. “No it’s just like—you’re choosing to buy all of these dated things—hold onto some pretty dated ideas”. “I mean—I think marriage is a pretty dumb idea. Buying new clothing and furniture isn’t a big deal—and technology is really important”. “And I mean”—he paused—“I can’t imagine not ever using Uber or transit—I mean this is New York”—he laughed.

Usually optimistic—and usually one not to have her ideologies challenged—Iris felt a rare emotion. She felt irritable. “Well—I think repurposing things—and holding on to a sense of the old ways of doing things—can be beneficial”. “How so?”—he asked while facing her. “Because the modern way of doing things—I mean, have you seen the world?”. He sighed, “people evolve. That’s human nature. We are supposed to progress. Yes, doing things for the environment is cool—but holding onto old ideologies—I don’t know—modern trends can be really cool, if you’d try them”. Iris remained silent—attempting to process his angle. “Well, answer me this—and we can change the topic”. “Yes?”—she replied. “Do you cook every night? I mean—once you’re married—are you gonna quit working? If you’re going to maintain the trend of your dated outlook on life—these are things you’d want to hold onto—right?”. Iris had enough. No one ever challenged her—or her views—and she, at this moment, wanted to end the date. “Hey, um—it’s been a long night”. Maybe Brent sensed her frustration because he simply nodded. “You’re right—I’m gonna get going”. “Thanks for the beers—and the conversation”—he said—and left. Iris sighed—and knew that she’d

once again have to rely on the dating app to find Mr. Right. And spent the rest of the weekend—sulking and swiping.

“Long weekend?”—Iris’s boss and shop owner questioned. She had no idea. Iris had spent the entirety of Sunday—processing her conversation with Brent. He had challenged her—and she was surprised that he had made her upset. Usually one for optimism and a *carpe diem* outlook on life—these emotions were new to her. Sure, she loved the dated ideologies that he seemed to have disdain for. So what if all of her clothes were thrifted—and so what if she wanted to be a stay at home mom with two children. And yes, unbeknownst to him, she did want to cook every night. That’s how she grew up—and it’s what she held onto. Who was he to challenge that—to question it? Who did he think he was—

“Iris, you there?”—the voice snapped her out of her stewing. “Oh. Sorry, Sarah! Yes, long weekend. Two dates”, she smiled. “Oh! How were they? I’m living vicariously through you”, Sarah smiled. Sarah was in her mid 40’s—and celibate. So—as she put it—her dating life ceased to exist.

Iris—in her rumination of Brent—realized she misspoke. “Actually, one date. The other guy—well, something must have come up, he didn’t show”. “Oh, that sucks. So, how’d the one date go?”. Iris stared toward the clothing racks—and made a note to try on a peach blazer—“It went well enough. I don’t think I’d go out with him again”. “Why?”. “To put it simply, he’s an asshole”. Sarah laughed, “well there are more people out there”—her phrase aligning with her personal choice in men and women. “Ugh, I sure hope so”, Iris sighed. Wanting to take her thoughts off of Brent, she decided to switch the topic, “so, what’d you do this weekend?”. Sarah opened the curtains—and started the preparation of shop beverages. “It was actually eventful. I went thrifting, and found a few items to sell. I’m getting them cleaned now”. “Oh wow! I can’t wait to see the pieces”. “You’re going to love them”, Sarah smiled. Iris was happy that someone besides herself—understood the coolness of vintage clothing.

The day seemed to past by slowly—and Iris slowly felt herself beginning to dive back into the recount of her conversation with him. Why couldn’t she get him off of her mind? What was it about him?—these were questions that she asked herself repeatedly.

As she fidgeted with a dated 35mm camera—she heard her phone’s text notification. She quickly retrieved her touch screen phone from her thrifted mom jeans—and saw that it was none other than—

“Hey, I am so sorry I didn’t show for our date. Something came up. I should have called you. Texted you. Something. Can I make it up to you? I am so sorry”. It was Mr. No Show. But, feeling like her luck in the dating department wasn’t going as well as it could have been—she ultimately decided to reply.

“Sure. Drinks? Same place as before?”—she typed.

He responded in two minutes. Eight minutes less than she had before.

“Sounds great! How is seven?”

Iris toyed with her phone—she got off at six—and would have to walk home and change—or she could go directly to the café—or—

Silencing her thoughts, she quickly responded, “Sure”.

“In deep thought?”—she heard Sarah question as she walked through the entrance of the store. Iris quickly glanced in her direction and smiled, “actually happy thoughts. I have a date tonight”. “Oh really, with who?!” “Mr. Know—his name is Ethan. Hopefully he shows up this time”, she sighed. “Oh, giving him another chance? You never know—he could be the one”. “I guess we’ll see”, Iris half-smiled—half of her was excited but she had to be honest—the other half, still skeptical.

Iris didn't work a long distance from the café on 33rd—and once she and Sarah said their goodbyes—she hopped on her bicycle and placed her retro headphones over her ears. She needed the wind and music to put her nerves at ease.

She secured her bike—and walked inside of the café—squinting in the direction of the tables and chairs. She coyly scanned the room—in hopes that he was there. It was nearing seven. Just as she decided that maybe it wasn't a good idea that she agreed to a second date, she felt a light tap on her shoulder.

“Iris?”—a masculine voice spoke. She quickly turned around—and Mr. No Show—turned Ethan, had arrived.

“How'd you know?”—she playfully questioned. At this moment—she was feeling rather flirty. It didn't help that Ethan checked all of her looks boxes.

“I recognized your hair from your pictures on the app”, he smiled. Iris blushed and pushed her sandy brown ringlets behind her ear. “So, are we gonna grab a bite to eat or?”—she questioned—feeling as bold as the red lip she wore. “Of course”, he smiled.

Ethan and Iris talked for hours. If it wasn't for the café being twenty-four hours—she was sure that they would have been reminded of the closing time. Throughout their conversation—she learned that he worked in sales. Check. She also learned that he had his own apartment near Greenwich Village. Check. And while they shared an ice cream sundae—with a cherry on top—she learned that he was currently considering investing in his future. Ah—check.

Iris loved the way that he asked questions—but seemingly led the conversation. At times, he spoke over her—but it was in her, to be rather submissive to her masculine counterpart. So different from her conversation with Brent—and how he seemingly let her take the lead at times. She internally rolled her eyes—and quickly shifted her attention back to Mr. Right.

“So, I was thinking—”, Iris started with after marveling over Ethan's recount of his vacation in Spain. “So yeah—I mean, the food there was wonderful! I went on a wine and food tour—my gosh! One of the best vacations of my life”, he interrupted. Iris decided that her idea concerning a second date—could wait—she wanted Ethan to have the floor at all times.

As he paid for the check—Iris checked the time on her phone. It was 11 PM—and she didn't want the night to end.

“So—my place or yours?”—she asked—in the same flirtatious tone as her earlier greeting. Ethan glanced in her direction and smiled—“Your place, for you. And my place, for me—I'm a gentleman”. His response—caught her off guard—in a good way, she concluded. And even though she wanted him over her place—she had to say—his response definitely made her like him that much more. Check.

Iris bicycled home alone—with a smile on her face. She was happy that she had given Ethan another chance—she loved his conversation. His ideologies about life. She was sure—if a relationship came of this—he would make the perfect husband. And sure—he hadn't suggested a second date—but she was sure that she was everything he was looking for as well.

Part Two

The holiday season was approaching—Iris’s favorite time of year. And during Thanksgiving this year—she’d be bringing a plus one to her family’s annual dinner—a boyfriend.

Following their date—Ethan took a week to do it—but he had finally asked Iris out again. Their second date—more intimate—at an upscale restaurant in the city. A few more dates followed—some romantic—some casual—and in his true sense of being a gentleman, he asked her to be exclusive. Iris was head over heels in love—it had only been a few months—but she knew he was the one. And she awaited the day—he’d propose.

While daydreaming about their future—Iris didn’t notice the sound of her teapot. She quickly retrieved the circa 1970’s tea kettle—and poured the water into a printed mug. As she waited for her Earl Grey to steep—she popped a movie into the VCR. Not in the mood for music—she wanted the background noise to come from a different source.

Iris sat on her couch—coffee mug in hand—and hummed a familiar tune. As she zoned out—she realized her phone’s vibration. Usually, one to keep her phone on loud—she adopted Ethan’s ideology—to keep it on vibrate as he so often did. She turned her phone over—and felt the irritation she tried so hard to forget.

“So yeah. Not sure why I’m texting you. Well no. I know. I am totally sorry about everything I said. I realized I was a jerk. Super sorry. Maybe we can catch up sometime? Ugh, idk what I’m saying....yeah, I’m sorry. Hope you are super good”.

“Brent”—she sighed. And after ten minutes of thinking—she decided not to respond.

Iris tried hard to forget him—they had only had one date. And at times—she’d find herself comparing a few hours with him—to the few months she shared with Ethan. Brent was an asshole—he even challenged her thoughts and dated thinking—as he so eloquently explained. And Ethan. Was everything that she had ever wanted. He had the job. The beautiful apartment. And he loved her ideology of wanting to be a stay at home wife—with two kids—in a gated neighborhood if their budget allowed. Brent could never.

Iris finished her tea—stretched—and decided to call Ethan. She hadn’t seen him in a week—and she missed him. Dearly.

“My beautiful girlfriend! What’s up?”—he answered on the fourth ring. Iris blushed at his greeting—he always knew the right words to say—and was always so sure of himself unlike—. She quickly shifted her attention back to her boyfriend.

“Nothing. I just made some tea. I was wondering if—“. “—Hey, hold on one second, I’m watching the game—and my team is losing”, he interrupted. Iris waited—patiently—it was football season—and she had come to learn that games were everything to Ethan. As the silence overcame the phone call—she decided to sort through her CD collection—and made a note to go thrifting soon.

“Yeah—half time. So what’s up, beautiful?”. She finally had the floor. “Nothing—I was wondering if maybe we could grab dinner tonight?”. There was a brief pause. “Not tonight. I made plans with the guys—maybe tomorrow?”. “Oh—yeah, sure that’s—“. “—Hey, babe the game is back on! Mind if I call you a little later?”. “Sure—that’s—“. He hung up before she could continue. Sometimes Ethan’s sense of dismissal irritated Iris—but she knew that with him hopefully—eventually—becoming her husband—it was something that she would definitely get used to.

Realizing that she probably needed to start making a few friends of her own—Iris decided to call Sarah. Yes—she was her boss—and okay yeah, she was in her forties—but Iris hadn't had much luck in the friendship department and needed a sense of female energy in her life.

“Oh my gosh! What a pleasant surprise!”, Sarah laughed while answering the call—“My favorite employee calling me on a weekend”. “Your only employee”, Iris laughed in return. “Oh—yes, yes you're right”. “So, is everything okay?”.

Iris felt a little awkward calling Sarah—due to the call being non-business related—but decided to continue. “Well yeah—I just wanted to see if maybe you wanted to get a bite to eat? Maybe do a little thrifting?”. “Wait—you wanna hang out with your old and boring boss?”—Sarah laughed—“I'm honored! What time?!”. As she and Sarah made plans on where and when to meet—Iris felt a tinge of excitement. She hadn't hung out with a female counterpart in what felt like years. Her old best friend—moving and moving on—had gotten married two years ago. Iris reflected on her old best friend's wedding day—the two children that now resulted from the nuptials—and the suburban neighborhood in which she and her husband now resided. A life that Iris wanted badly—hence, her search for the one opposed to a friend.

As she hand-washed her dishes—Iris couldn't help but think how her life with Ethan would be. She was sure that he would propose. Why wouldn't he—she constantly asked herself. She provided him with the dainty and delicate personality that she was sure he adored. She always made it a point to discuss her future plans as a stay at home parent—in an attempt to show her counterpart—that she would make the perfect wife. And in turn—Ethan provided her with safety—him being the stronger lead in all of their conversations and plans. They never debated—she would always concede. They never argued—she would never challenge his beliefs. At this point—she considered—she was just waiting on the ring she knew she would receive.

Feeling an overall sense of warmth—partly due to thoughts of Ethan—the other from the Earl Grey—Iris slipped into a light jacket, forewent a scarf, and had a lot of pep in her step as she walked out of her apartment.

“Looking good!”—Sarah greeted as Iris approached her. They decided to meet at a new thrift store near Greenwich—and Iris decided to take the train. Due to her usually walking or bicycling—she missed her stop and it made her a tad late. “Oh my gosh, I would have totally been here a lot earlier, I got turned around—let's just say I had to wait for another A train”, she playfully groaned. “Hey, no worries! I'm just glad you're here!” , Sarah smiled—she too needed friendship in her life and was as equally excited about their outing.

As they walked into the vintage shop—Iris couldn't help but marvel at all of the clothing racks—VHS collections—and she noticed they even had cassette tapes. “We picked a great place!” , she expressed while grabbing Sarah's arm. “We did” , she smiled in return.

An hour went by—and by the time they met back up—both Iris and Sarah had their recycled shopping bags full. “Oh my gosh—I'm going to have to Uber home today” , Iris laughed while placing her items on the counter. “There is no way I am getting on the train with all of this stuff—it's so heavy!”. Through her browsing and ultimate choosing—Iris purchased two jackets, four pairs of mom jeans, five VHS tapes—and at the last minute she decided to start a cassette collection, choosing six tapes she had to have. “Ma'am your total comes to forty dollars and ten cents”—the cashier relayed while bagging her items. Iris handed over her debit card—and marveled at her finds. “And this is why we thrift” , she laughed in Sarah's direction. “Agreed” , Sarah smiled in return.

As they walked outside—Iris felt the cool air hit her face. “I can't believe its already five”—she expressed while zipping up her windbreaker. “And I can't believe I didn't wear a heavier jacket! Good thing I thrifted new ones”—she smiled while holding up the brown canvas bag. “I know! That was such a fun shopping trip. I am so ready to style my new earrings”—Sarah replied while

searching for them in her bag of vintage goods. Iris bit the side of her bottom lip—as she so often did—and hurriedly spoke, “wanna maybe grab some food now? I wasn’t sure if we were still gonna do that—I mean if you want—”. “Of course I want”—Sarah paused—almost giving up on searching for her scalloped earrings—“It’s getting pretty cold out. You know I don’t live far from here—how about I cook us something! It’ll be fun!”. Iris had worked at the consignment shop for five years—and had never been to Sarah’s apartment. But—in her euphoric state of mind—she happily agreed.

“Welcome to my most humble abode!”—Sarah happily exclaimed as they entered the prewar building. Iris’s eyes widened—she had never been inside an apartment of this caliber—an older build—one that she so desperately wanted to live in herself. The molding—the french doors—the high ceilings—and the view. As she took it all in—she hadn’t heard Sarah’s question. “Drink?”—Sarah asked again—this time a little louder than before. “Oh my gosh, yes! Thank you. Sarah, your place is beyond beautiful”, Iris replied while placing her bag onto a woven rug. “Thank you! I hope you don’t mind the clutter”—she laughed while pouring two glasses of French wine. “But—I tend to be a maximalist”, she continued. Iris was no stranger to strewing her belongings—anywhere and everywhere. “You should see my apartment! My place makes your place look neat”, she giggled. “Maybe someday I can!”—Sarah smiled while handing Iris a floral-inspired etched glass containing the red wine.

Iris thanked her—and sat on one of the Moroccan inspired poufs. “This is really good!”—she smiled after taking a sip. “Ten years of aging will do that”. “Wait—huh?”. “Oh, the wine”, Sarah laughed. “It was aged for ten years”. “Oh!”—Iris expressed—feeling a little embarrassed that she wasn’t as fluent in wine culture. Possibly sensing her embarrassment—Sarah continued with—“It’s okay—wine is like my life—oh and thrifting too!”, she smiled.

The two women—sat parallel from one another—but seemed to have a lot more in common than Iris expected. Now seeing her boss—turned possible friend—in a different light—she decided to relax a little more than she originally intended to. “So, what’s for dinner?”—she smiled—feeling the effects of the wine and the overall vibe of Sarah’s uptown apartment. “Ever had homemade pizza before?”. Iris glanced in her direction and smiled—“I haven’t! Growing up, we always ordered in”, she laughed. “Well, my favorite employee—you’re in for a treat”. “Your only employee”, Iris giggled. “My only”, Sarah smiled—and walked into the kitchen.

“So, where did you learn to prepare homemade pizza?”—Iris asked—while helping herself to a second glass of wine. “Well”—Sarah paused while glancing into her mint green refrigerator. “Believe it or not—when I was your age, I was quite adventurous. I studied abroad in Italy—and the host family taught me how to make a lot of Italian dishes—and pizza was one of them”, she smiled while chopping up the tomatoes and onions. Iris looked on—intrigued by Sarah’s narrative and cooking skills. “I’ve since tweaked the recipes—a little more to my liking—but the basics? I learned from them”. Iris couldn’t imagine moving away from New York City—let alone, to another country. And if the opportunity presented itself—she was sure she wouldn’t entertain it. But curious—nonetheless—she followed with, “what made you study abroad? I mean—”, she paused—wanting to word her question with tact. “I don’t know if I could ever do that”, she decided to end with.

As the homemade pizza sauce simmered on the gas stove—Sarah kneaded the dough. She appeared deep in thought—and Iris thought maybe she wouldn’t answer the question. Maybe it was too intrusive. Maybe—

“I followed my heart. I fell in love with a woman who was visiting here”—she appeared to be relieving a dream. She laughed, “I was only twenty-two—so a little younger than you—and I was literally in my last semester of college—but I knew I couldn’t let her get away”—she paused. “You know—move without me seeing what the possibility of us could be”. Iris nodded her head—almost in a trance of some sort—the story, beautiful—and Sarah’s recount made it even more whimsical.

“So—I pushed back my graduation date—hurriedly registered for an Italian class for the following semester—and the rest is history, literally”, she laughed. “Before I knew it—I was signing up for the study abroad program—getting a travel visa—and going to be with the love of my life”.

“So, what happened? I mean—I—you and the woman?”. Sarah shook her head as she placed the pepperoni and salami slices onto the flattened pizza dough. “Well—to put it simply—it didn’t work. But I don’t regret it at all. We still keep in contact—so there’s that”—she smiled while placing the pizza into the oven.

Maybe it was the wine. Or maybe—Iris wanted to accompany Sarah in her sense of vulnerability—but she decided if she wanted a friendship with Sarah—it was time to start opening up. “So, Ethan and I are still going strong—I really think he’s the one. I think—”, she paused—“he’s going to be my husband”. Sarah half-smiled and poured herself another glass of wine, looked up at Iris—and followed with, “how do you know? That he’s the one?”. Iris looked off—and out of the patio doors—no one had ever asked her that—about Ethan, anyway. She was accustomed to girl talk—but, it had been a long time—and she considered herself rusty on the discussion of significant others.

“I just feel it—you know? I love the way he makes me feel. He makes me feel—”, she paused—“I love him”. “Ah, love”, Sarah smiled while walking over to the Moroccan pouf. Iris followed.

“You know how I knew I was in love?”—Sarah started with while staring toward the patio—past Iris’s direction. “How?”—Iris whispered. “Whenever I was near her—my heart would pound in my chest—but I felt—I felt safe. So, I knew it wasn’t from nervousness”, she laughed. “Her touch made me feel warm—her words, too—and when everything and nothing mattered—she was always the focal point of my being”. Sarah now looked in Iris’s direction—“Does Ethan make you feel that way?”. Before Iris could respond—Sarah walked into the kitchen and retrieved their dinner from the oven.

“Okay, my guest gets first try”—Sarah smiled while handing Iris her plate. Iris was still deep in thought—and if it wasn’t for the aroma of the pizza—she was sure her head would have still been in the clouds.

She smiled—thanked Sarah—and took a bite. “Oh my gosh! Sarah!”—she exclaimed while covering her mouth. The pepperoni and salami pizza—was like nothing she had tasted before. The homemade sauce seemed to accompany the grated mozzarella perfectly. And the savoriness of the chosen meats seemed to accompany the entire pie—it was probably the best pizza she had ever tried.

“I’m so happy you like it!”—Sarah exclaimed while taking a bite, herself. “I have to say—I outdid myself on this one”. Feeling appreciative—happy—and content about their budding friendship Iris decided to follow with, “maybe next time, I can cook something special for you?!”. “I’d love that”—Sarah smiled. Maybe it was the deliciousness of the pizza—maybe they were now both deep in thought—or maybe, they each didn’t know what to say—but, they ultimately continued their meal in silence.

After helping Sarah clean up—they retreated back onto the colorful poufs. “I wish it wasn’t so chilly outside—I would have loved for us to sit on the patio”. “Got a blanket?”—Iris asked while smiling. Sarah caught onto the hint—retrieved two wool blankets—and the two, moved their friend date—outside.

The sound of pedestrians—car horns—and the MTA against the gravel—filled the silence between the two women turned friends. Still deep in thought from their earlier conversation—Iris bit her lip and toyed with her phone.

“I am so glad we did this”—Sarah led with. “Me too”—Iris smiled—now facing her direction. “This is just such a big city—I’ve lived here my entire life, and I’ve maybe formed—three

solid friendships”—she sighed. Two more—than Iris had formed—she thought to herself—but decided not to respond. “It’s so difficult to find people you truly connect with—beyond the surface—you know?”—she ended with while taking a sip of her wine. Iris nodded her head—and briefly re-visited her attempts to create and maintain friendships. Most of her friendships—mostly formed in university—hadn’t stuck. And the one that had—moved on with her life. Iris sighed—and took a sip out of her glass.

“So—your place or mine next time?”—Iris giggled—partly from the wine—but mostly from her attempt to liven the otherwise stagnant mood. “Definitely yours—I want to see this Brooklyn loft!”. Feeling a lot more comfortable and wanting to open up a little bit more—Iris half-smiled—“Yeah, it’s pretty great. My parents purchased—and lived in it—um—a few years ago”. She paused while Sarah listened on. “They ended up purchasing a bigger home—upstate—but decided not to sell—so when it was time for me to move out—they handed me the keys”, she smiled—recounting her first day living alone—as a grown-up.

“The city that never sleeps—used to be the city of better real estate”—Sarah laughed. “Lucky you!”—she smiled with her eyes.

The two women—turned friends—sat on the patio until the foot-traffic lessened and the MTA ran their last routes. Iris quickly glanced at her phone—partly because she didn’t want to seem rude during her and Sarah’s conversation—and partly because she wanted to see if her boyfriend had messaged her. He hadn’t.

“You have to go?”—Sarah asked—while pulling her legs underneath her. Iris shook her head—and forced a smile—in an attempt to hide her disappointment in Ethan.

“Hey, there’s something I want to show you—let’s go back inside”—Sarah gestured while folding her blanket onto the patio chair. Iris nodded—and followed.

“You know I’m a maximalist”—Sarah laughed—“So give me a second while I search through this pile of stuff”. Iris sat on the Moroccan pouf and waited patiently.

“Found it!”—Sarah exclaimed—while pulling out a gold necklace. Intrigued—Iris’s eyes widened—and she found herself asking—“What’s the story on this beautiful piece?”.

Sarah handed Iris the necklace—and sat across from her.

“Well—I got this from a market while living in Italy—a lady had a booth set up—and I was intrigued by a lot of her goods—I know the younger generation thinks crystals and such are new trends—but let me tell you, we were interested in them back then too”.

To be clear—Iris knew of people who loved the supposed healing properties of precious stones—but had never really been interested in them herself. But wanting to be respectful during Sarah’s recount of her purchase—she simply nodded.

“You see that stone?”—Sarah motioned toward the necklace in Iris’s hand. Iris nodded. “Well that’s clear quartz—it’s great for mental clarity. And sometimes—when my mind is in a fuzzy state—I will wear that necklace. Does it help? Well—still up for debate. But my gosh, does it make me feel a lot better”—she paused—seemingly finding the words to end with. “It’s given me a lot of great use—and I want you to have it. I mean, if you’d like”—she smiled.

Although Iris wasn’t a fan of modern ideologies concerning spirituality—she had to say—this was the most thoughtful gesture anyone had ever given her. And without a second thought—she agreed—“I’ll take it! Thank you, Sarah”.

Maybe it was the wine—the overall mood of the night—or, maybe the clear quartz did indeed have healing properties—but Iris swore that she left Sarah’s house that night—with a new necklace and a clearer mind.

Part Three

Life was different. The air smelt different—the seasons felt more intense—and clothing began to feel different on her skin. Instead of noticing the patterns of the pieces that she thrifted—she felt the fabrics as they brushed against her skin.

Iris had a new view of the world.

Iris and Ethan—had also broken up.

Following her night at Sarah's—Iris went home—made a pot of tea—and recounted her evening as she traced her fingers along the necklace. From Sarah's story on love—to being adventurous—and living her life the way that she wanted—Iris couldn't help but re-evaluate her own. No one—not her parents—nor her friends—friend—or, a male counterpart had ever provided her with the insight she needed to possibly change some of her dated views.

And two weeks later—after realizing that Ethan would never take her feelings into consideration—on anything—she ended the relationship.

That Thanksgiving—she did not, in fact, have a plus one.

Iris didn't attribute her new line of thinking to the clear stone that she now wore—but she instead, related her new line of thought to her friendship with Sarah. Following that night—the two were almost inseparable. They went to brunch. Sarah recounted memories of her life—Iris recounted some life events of her own—and every day it felt like they became closer. Never mind the age gap—the two considered themselves, best friends.

With the spring weather approaching—and the feelings of the cold—both literally and figuratively wearing off—Iris figured this would be a great weekend for a girl's—woman's night.

As she pulled on her bright yellow sweatshirt and unplugged her phone from the charger—she decided to call Sarah. The two hadn't hung out—outside of the consignment shop in two weeks. And although they were close—Iris couldn't bring herself to ask why.

“Give me a sec, okay?”—Sarah greeted after the second ring. Iris smiled—and quickly responded—“Uh-huh, sure!”.

As Iris waited on Sarah's return to the call—she scrolled through her television guide for something to fill the emptiness of noise in her loft. She had to say—deciding to get a streaming service was one of the best decisions she had ever made—it was a lot easier to sort through programs than a VHS collection.

“Perfect”—she whispered while clicking on the title of a dated movie about romance. Her ideologies about technology had evolved—but her love for vintage films remained.

“Okay—I'm here!”—Sarah spoke into the phone—almost out of breath. “Were you running a marathon?”—Iris giggled. “Something like it—my date and I—“ she paused. Iris turned down the volume to her television. “Date?”—Iris hurriedly asked. Who was the unknown man or woman in Sarah's life—she had to know.

“Well—I was waiting until things got a little more serious”—“And to be honest, I think they are”. Iris was beginning to feel anxious—she wanted to know—now. “So—who is she or he?!”.

“Well—it's a she—and Iris—I'm in love”.

Over the course of the next hour—maybe longer—Iris had truly lost track of time while listening to Sarah's recount—she learned about Sarah's new love. The two—as Sarah put it—had met at a bar. “A lesbian bar in the city—I wanted to put myself out there—and I'm glad I did”—she mentioned during her recount. The two—started out as friends—and then one thing led to

another—and now, they were considering moving in together. “Cliché right?”—Sarah laughed—“We are lesbian culture, she and I”.

Iris was happy for her boss turned best friend—if anyone deserved happiness, it was Sarah. But suddenly—she began to feel the familiarity of a best friend moving on with their life—and a wave of sadness came over her. After ending the call—Iris changed into a green sweatshirt—and chose a movie from her VHS collection.

As the end credits rolled—and the instrumentals faded into the background—Iris revisited the possibility of reinstalling the dating app. After ending her relationship with Ethan—she decided that it would be a good idea to pause her anxious need for a relationship. For marriage—children. Her utter need of finding the one. And it helped that Sarah filled her days with laughter—friendship intimacy—and outings. But now—that Sarah was going to have a new priority—she figured she, too, should put herself out there—and maybe this time, she, too, would get lucky.

Iris took a quick selfie—sans makeup—hair in a messy bun—uploaded it to the app—and typed out a quick bio. She didn’t think anything would come of it—so she didn’t feel the need to put much effort into her photograph or words.

Not in the mood to swipe—just yet—she placed her phone back onto the charger—and took a nap.

Ding, ding, ding.

The sound of Iris’s phone’s notification—pulled her out of sleep. She quickly retrieved her phone—and saw that someone from her not so distant past had messaged her. This time—she was curious rather than annoyed.

“Hey, it’s me. I know you didn’t respond last time, and I know I deserved that. But I kind of need your help. My mom’s birthday is coming up, and she really wants a specific pair of earrings, that they don’t make anymore. Something vintage. And I knew if anyone could help me find them, or point me in the right direction, it would be you. I hope you are well. And if you could help, I would really appreciate the favor!”

Ten minutes went by.

Ten turned into twenty.

And before Iris knew it—her ruminating thoughts led her into an hour of what she should do.

On-trend with her new modern way of thinking—she responded to Brent’s text. Sure, he wasn’t the one. And sure, she wasn’t quite sure if she’d ever fully forgive him—but, she figured it wasn’t worth holding onto old feelings—and decided that she could indeed be of help.

His response came faster than she had expected—and before she knew it—they were planning a place to meet.

Iris didn’t feel the need to dress up—it wasn’t a date after all. So, after slipping into a pair of mom jeans—dad sneakers—and a light sweater—she forewent the once over in the mirror—and left out of the door.

As Iris walked—she bit the side of her lip. Somewhat anxious—although she couldn’t pinpoint why—she tried to create an imagery of what she and Brent’s interaction would entail.

“Hey”—Brent greeted as she approached the antique jewelry store she suggested. “Hey!”—she smiled while straightening her hair. Brent had changed—well, outward at least. His longer hair—now short—his clothes a little more tailored—and his smile—well, that was still as attractive as ever. But. Iris wasn’t there for that—she was simply there to help an old friend—date—whatever one would label it—search for vintage earrings.

“You look great!”—he smiled while gesturing toward the door. “You—you do too”, Iris half-smiled in return.

The awkwardness that Iris thought would occur—between the two—was nonexistent. She felt the same comfortableness she felt the night of their date—before their disagreement. As they looked through the jewelry case—Brent interrupted the silence.

“So, how’s everything been going?” Iris thought to herself how she should answer—her mind wandered to Ethan—she and Sarah’s new friendship—and her interests in modern technology. She even considered telling Brent that her views on being a stay at home—of two children—had changed. But—in true Iris fashion—she didn’t want to give him—Brent—the satisfaction of being right.

“I’ve been good! I’ve been trying some new teas—I finally got a streaming service. I have to say—it’s pretty cool”, she smiled. Okay—a little satisfaction wasn’t too bad.

“What?! Wow—I guess things have changed”—he smiled. Iris could feel herself blushing—and just before she was about to speak—a shop assistant approached where they stood.

“May I help you two with anything?”—an older woman with salt and pepper hair asked. Iris decided to lead—this was her area of expertise after all.

“Hi! Yes. We are looking for a pair of earrings. Not a specific brand—but they are gold. With a small diamond in the middle. They are drop—and the detail is very intricate around the stone”. As she spoke—the saleswoman looked through the previously used merchandise—pulling her silver-rimmed glasses closer to her face.

“Sorry. We don’t carry those”—the woman finally decided to respond. “Maybe you can try—somewhere in the village?”—she continued without making eye contact. Iris was no stranger to the snootiness of shop owners and workers alike while shopping for vintage goods. Brent quickly glanced toward her—before she spoke. “Yes—thank you. I’m sure they’ll have what we are looking for. I know how hard it is to locate precious pieces—I work in consignment myself”. Before the saleswoman could respond—Iris pulled Brent’s arm—and left the store.

“Oh my gosh!”—“Is that the culture of those places? I mean—I thought I was in a luxury goods store of some sort”—Brent laughed as the two walked. “You have no idea, Brent—its an acquired taste for some—and they treat antique goods like they are antique gods”—she laughed. “But—I have to say—offering and purchasing something that isn’t made anymore—is pretty sacred”, she giggled—recounting the beginning days of her thrifting adventures.

“Yeah—I get that. I guess I can see your love for it. Overall, the store was pretty cool”. “So, where to now—the village—“ he laughed—in his attempt to mock the snooty saleswoman. Iris giggled—“Yes! I think I know the perfect place”. “Per my phone—it’s about a twenty-minute walk—“, she paused—“Or, would you rather Uber there?”. “Streaming services and using ride-sharing—I have to say—welcome to the real world”—Brent laughed. Iris playfully rolled her eyes. “But—it’s a nice day out—let’s walk”—he finished with. Iris caught herself staring into his eyes—but not wanting to get involved—in whatever she was feeling—she simply looked away—and led their commute.

As the two walked—the silence only lasted a brief while—until Iris ultimately decided to lead the conversation. “So—how’s life been treating you? Anything new?”—she wasn’t sure where her question would carry the conversation—and she wasn’t sure—why now—why at this moment—she was so interested in what he had been up to.

“Well—still at the tea store. I really love it there. I got a new roommate—she’s pretty cool”. As he continued to talk—Iris began to think. She? Did he have a new flame? A new dating app love—gone right?.

“Oh, you’re dating—that’s great”—she found herself blurting out—almost interrupting him. Something she hardly ever did with Ethan.

Brent chuckled—“Not in the slightest. Besides—I think my roommate is more into women”. He paused—“Still single”. Iris didn’t know why the second part of what he told her—

made her feel happy—excited—interested? She couldn't pinpoint it. But what she did know—was that she was thanking herself—for responding to his text.

The two continued their walk in silence—not due to tension—but the possible reintroduction of former sparks.

“Well—here we are”—Iris smiled while pointing at the neon sign. “Oh wow—I don't know why I envisioned like an old building—with a worn-out sign—this place is pretty cool”. “Yeah—I've been here a few times—they accept a lot of newer things. I think we'll find what we are looking for”.

And she was right.

It only took twenty minutes—from the time they entered the store—to locating the earrings—a brief chat with the salesman—and Brent paying for the gift.

“That was amazing!”—Brent smiled while running his hands through his hair. “I mean—I was pretty hopeless on finding these earrings! Now—all I need is a card and I'm set!”—he continued to smile. “Thank you, Iris! Thank you!”. Iris smiled, “anything for an old friend!”. She briefly looked into his eyes—bit her lip—and looked toward the other shops.

“Hey—what are you doing right now?”. “I'm standing here with you”—she laughed. “Well yeah. But, did you have any other plans today?”. Once Iris realized that he was possibly asking her to dinner—she sighed—inwardly—at her choice in clothing and hair. “I—um—I'm free”. “Down for a dinner—among friends?”. She half-smiled and nodded yes.

The early evening—turned into a late-night dinner among two single twenty-somethings—with undeniable chemistry. Awkward gazes—turned into stares—and laughter turned into flirting. Iris was comfortable—and enjoyed having her say during their conversations—both on the surface—and deep in nature.

That night—Brent slept over.

And after two weeks—he asked Iris to be official. Her answer—was yes.

No months of courting. No daydreams of someday getting married—the white picket fence—and Iris was beginning to doubt that she even wanted children anymore.

Her ideologies had changed. No longer yearning to be a housewife—she was living in the moment—and loving her role as a girlfriend.

Part Four

Following a year of dating—heart to heart conversations—heated discussions—and a few arguments about Iris’s ideologies—Iris and Brent were still going strong as ever. She was in love. And so was he.

As Iris searched through her makeup collection—and prepared for her and Brent’s date—she remembered she needed to check on the consignment shop. It was now her job to keep the business going—Sarah had gotten married—and moved upstate. Leaving Iris—head of the vintage establishment.

Life was good. Iris had a new job role—she and Brent were happy—she was sure she didn’t want marriage anymore. And, life in the suburbs wasn’t for her—she preferred to remain in the city. Ding. Ding.

Iris knew who it was—and didn’t let the third ding sound. She was excited to hear from her other half.

“Hey! We need to talk! Mind if I come over a little earlier?”

Iris stared toward the brick wall—and quickly shifted her gaze out of the window. What was so important—that Brent couldn’t tell her over the phone? Or a message. Or—. She decided to stop overthinking—and replied.

“Yes! That’s great! See you soon!”—she paused typing. And finished with, “I love you”.

Iris was no stranger to the “we need to talk” text messages—and her anxious mind began to wander. Tapping into her optimistic frame of mind—she hoped for the best.

As Iris blended her eyeshadow—a makeup skill that she was quite the novice on—she ran her fingers along the bristled brush’s fibers. She made a note to wash them soon. As she lined her upper lid—she heard a knock at the door.

Brent’s knock.

She smiled and quickly placed her compact mirror on the coffee table—and ran toward the metal door.

“Babel!”—she squealed. Her past feelings of anxiety had all but diminished. Feelings of excitement—on seeing her love—took over.

“You look really nice!”—he smiled while walking toward the refrigerator. This was Brent’s thing—he’d come over—get a bottle of water or beer depending on the time of day—and have a seat on Iris’s couch. They’d talk—flirt—sometimes argue—make out—and make plans for the day. It was their thing. And, after reading his message—Iris hoped that it would always be.

Not wanting to rush him—but curious nonetheless—Iris joined him in the kitchen—before he took a seat.

“So, what’s up? Everything okay?”—she asked—feelings of anxiousness began to resurface.

“Yeah—so”. He paused—taking a quick sip of bottled spring water.

“Sorry for the dramatic message—I mean, I’m sure you’ve been overthinking”, he laughed. True.

“The thing is—I’ve been thinking. We’ve been together a year and”—he paused. Again.

Oh no. It was either marriage or breaking up—and Iris emotionally prepared herself for whatever followed.

“I think maybe—I mean—how do you feel about moving in together?”.

Wow.

On her road toward becoming a different woman—and changing her outlook on life and dating—Iris had written off the possibility of settling down. And all that came with it. At this moment—she wasn't sure how to respond.

"I—um—". "This is—". "I—". She struggled to find the words to say.

Brent caught the hint—"No, it's okay! I just kind of sprang it on you. I mean—think about it. No pressure!"—he now appeared anxious.

Wanting to comfort him—Iris stared into his eyes—"Just let me think about it, okay? I love you so much".

The two ultimately decided to stay in—ordered take out—and for once during their entire relationship—didn't have much to say that evening.

Two weeks had gone by.

Iris and Brent carried on—as if his question didn't continue to loom through both of their minds. And it had. Iris just hadn't had proper time to process it—she was busy as ever with work. And the back of her mind—is where her decision remained.

Brent—true to his understanding demeanor hadn't brought it back up. Another reason Iris loved him.

As Iris prepared to message Sarah on the possibility of hiring a new shop assistant—to fill her old position—she noticed she forgot to take an inventory of t-shirts and sweaters alike. Low inventory—meant less satisfied customers—and she wanted to continue to prove to Sarah that she made the right decision in allowing her to run the shop.

Rummaging through the racks—counting countless tees and knits—pen behind her ear—and a memo pad in hand—Iris sighed at all of the work she had to get done. Sure, she loved her new position—but she needed help.

"Forty—six"—she said aloud while writing the number down. Feeling like she needed a break—Iris rubbed her temples and took a seat behind the counter.

The word 'help' began to ruminate through her mind.

This time—it was unrelated to hiring a new shop assistant.

Instead, her thoughts were Brent focused. Her decision had finally made it to the front of her mind.

Brent could definitely be of help if he moved in. Iris thought about the bugs she wouldn't have to squish—the dishes she wouldn't have to clean, unless it was her turn—and laundry day would be a shared experience. And most important of all—the bills would be split. Sure, Iris didn't pay rent in her parental owned building. But, the streaming services—grocery deliveries—electricity. Suddenly—the idea clicked.

Putting a hold on messaging Sarah—Iris pulled her phone out of her back pocket—and quickly messaged Brent. Not wanting to leave him in the same state of overthinking—she decided to be more direct in her text.

"Let's do it. Let's move in together". Her heart pounding in her chest, she pressed send.

Three months had gone by.

Iris and Brent fell into a routine. They split the cost of late-night grocery deliveries—Sunday was always laundry day—and bills were discussed as they came. Life was easy. Life was fun. Uncomplicated. Until.

Iris got caught up in the domestic life—and her growing love of Brent—that she forgot to take an important pill.

And Iris fell pregnant. And she'd been pregnant the eight out of the twelve weeks she and Brent shared the Brooklyn loft.

Now two months—and still unsure of a plan—she wanted nothing more but to lie in bed and wish that she remembered to take the white pill. A mistake, nonetheless.

“Hey—you okay?”—Brent asked—while carrying a brown bag of groceries.

Things were tense.

“I’ve had better days—I can’t keep anything down”—Iris groaned.

“I got you some—“—Brent paused while pulling his purchases out of the bag—“crackers, a six-pack of ginger ale—they were out of the larger bottles—“.

“That’s the only six-pack I’ll be drinking for a while”, Iris half-smiled while mustering up a laugh.

Brent wasn’t in a laughing mood—“So, what are we gonna do? I mean—you have options—we have options”.

“I don’t know Brent”—she replied in short.

“What do you mean, you don’t know? You’re two months. I mean—what route are we going to go? Do I need to look for another job? Or, I mean—we considered adoption—“.

“Brent, I said I don’t know. And I don’t”.

He sighed and sat down on the edge of the bed—“Seriously. Meet me halfway. We aren’t prepared to have a baby. We both know that”.

Iris felt tears forming in her eyes—she was a mess. She had written off having kids—and had imagined her life with Brent without marriage and offspring alike. And now—as she was getting used to sharing her space—she now shared her body with a child—and at this moment, she wasn’t sure what to do.

But, somewhere in her heart—she hoped that they could at least try and make it work.

“You’re not prepared. What if I am?”.

“You said you didn’t want children—we’ve talked about it. And even if we did, we aren’t financially ready to bring a kid into the world”.

“Maybe you’re not. But I am”.

“You’re not”.

“I am! I’m keeping him. Or her”. —“I’m keeping our baby!”.

Brent didn’t respond.

Iris didn’t continue.

“Well—looks like your decision is made. I’ll figure out something”.

The next thing that Iris said—shocked even her—“I don’t want or need your help. I can do this alone”.

Brent looked toward her direction—but wouldn’t look in her eyes. Got up, grabbed his jacket—and left.

Ten weeks had gone by.

Iris was now nearing eighteen weeks—and the feelings of morning sickness were starting to lessen. She could now keep her favorite foods—at the moment—down—and Sarah commented that she had the pregnancy glow.

After hearing the news—Sarah decided to help in maintaining the shop. And, she and her wife rented an apartment—and would return upstate after Iris gave birth—but not before she was ready to return to work.

“So, are you excited about finding out the sex?”—Sarah asked while unpacking her and Iris’s lunch.

“I am!”—Iris smiled—her cheeks full of happiness. “My mom is going with me—my dad wants it to be a surprise!”.

“I can’t wait to find out!”—Sarah smiled.

“You’ll be the first one to know!”

“What about—?”—Sarah paused.

Iris caught the hint—“He told me to call him and tell him the news. We haven’t spoken much”.

The night that Brent left—he only returned to move out. Temporarily. Iris’s words had stung. And he—himself—wasn’t sure if he wanted to co-parent in their shared space. But, he wanted to be present in his child’s life. Even if it meant—he wouldn’t be present in Iris’s.

Two weeks had gone by.

Iris was getting dressed—in high anticipation of finding out the sex of the baby—that she had already grown to love.

As she highlighted her face—there was a knock at the door.

Brent’s knock.

Iris pulled at her overall strap—her earlier gratefulness that she had thrifted the oversized denim—and walked toward the metal door.

“Hey”—she greeted—while looking toward her growing stomach.

“Hey—mind if I come in?”—Brent asked—staring in the same direction.

“Sure—I mean this is still your place—if you want it to be”, she whispered while leading him into the kitchen.

Their thing.

“I’m sorry, Iris. I shouldn’t have left. I should have stayed. I—“.

Iris held up her hand—the loose overall strap becoming unbuttoned.

“Yes, we are bringing a kid into the world. No, it won’t be easy. But—I wouldn’t want to share this with anyone else. Brent, I love you. We need you here”.

Now—with tears in both of their eyes. They simply stared at one another. The love was still there. Now more than ever.

And Iris knew—at this moment—this would be their life.

And she was right.