

SHORT STORIES FROM WE ARE MADE OF STARS

THE STARS OF VISTA VIE

PARTS 1-4

ROCHELLE B.
WEINSTEIN

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *THIS IS NOT HOW IT ENDS*

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OF
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I stare at the email from Renée De La Rue, the name conjuring a host of memories I try to blink away.

Penny,

It's been some time. Jean-Paul and I have enjoyed following you and the family in the news, and we even caught Leo's last film at the Boone Theater. It's hard to believe you're the same young doves who landed on our doorstep all those years ago. And the children! There's so much of you and Leo in them. Their faces remind me of your first visit to Vis Ta Vie when Leo proposed. How old were you? Nineteen? Twenty? All that innocence, the curious smiles. Your wedding here remains one of the most memorable occasions we've ever hosted. Thank you for trusting us.

Let me get to my point. You know I tend to be long-winded. The anniversary's approaching.

I pause. She obviously hasn't read the latest trades. Leo. Leo and what's her name. Leo betraying me in the worst possible way.

It's a precarious time to ask this of you, or him, but I'm wondering if you plan on joining us. In marriage, we make all sorts of vows. Some we make good on. Others fall short. Circumstances change, life changes. But I believe you and Leo have always had the rare ingredients to keep marriage alive. Your affection spoke to me, and to Jean-Paul. Having hosted and witnessed your love is a reminder of all that's possible, how deep and magical first love can be.

Renée De La Rue is out of her mind if she thinks I'm carrying out the stupid vow we made all those years ago. I turn from the computer. I don't need to read anymore. I brush the memory aside, but it's pervasive. As the

anniversary creeps up on us, I'm keenly aware of its presence, goading me in a direction I've fought hard against.

Leo. Leo Shay. The boy who stole my heart and made my every fantasy come true. Leo Shay. The prick on the cover of *People's* Sexiest Man Alive issue. Fitting, the boy who resisted the spotlight became an actual star. We were engaged at the inn and then married a year later. It was a surprise to no one. We were destined to be together.

Now, our promise to return for our twentieth-fifth anniversary looms ahead. Our storybook marriage hanging by a thread. And Renée doesn't even know the other story. The one we haven't shared with the public.

The screen beckons me back. Curiosity more than anything else.

Maybe what's happening today is the reason you need to come back. Maybe now, on this silver anniversary, you need to fix what's been broken. Together. Maybe the salve is to leave the glare of Hollywood and return to the idyllic place you once called a second home. Let our unspoiled haven bring you two back to earth. I promise it'll be worth it. Jean-Paul's already curating the menu.

In short, Penny, I'm holding the date for you. And for Leo. I hope you'll consider the invitation. The big house misses you. We miss you.

*Warmly,
Renée*

I delete the email then quickly restore it from the trash.

Fuck Leo Shay.

Fuck our vows.

The only vow I'm making today is the kind that centers on divorce—meeting that lawyer, getting things going.

And fuck Renée for forcing me to relive the memory of Vis Ta Vie, the cozy inn set against the mountains of North Carolina, the alluring farmhouse which ushered us through milestones. Vis Ta Vie had been *home* to us for years, our annual week-long stays beginning when Leo first found the location to propose. We were nineteen. Babies, but Renée and Jean-Paul had made it an unforgettable trip.

“You’ve been vetted,” Jean-Paul had reminded us. “It takes a certain kind of wonderful to fall in love with this area.”

Wonderful. What a joke.

Leo and Penny.

Penny and Leo.

No matter who came first, we were one connected unit. And with that came unrealistic awe and expectations.

And criticism and hate.

A year after Leo proposed, we met on Vis Ta Vie’s sprawling green lawn, a sparkling summer day, surrounded by our closest friends and families. There was something about the fresh air, the towering oaks, the hills that rolled into each other that made it magical. We were idealistic kids, a mad and hungry affection making us crazy with love.

In the years that followed, before the girls (the universe played a cruel joke on Leo with three daughters), we’d lay in the grass, staring up at the stars, counting our dreams and blessings. Our arms and legs tangled like weeds, and I’m pretty sure that’s when we rooted ourselves to the earth. Let her ground and guide us through each phase. Leo nailing that first audition. Leo moving us to Los Angeles. Leo becoming a star. We had witnessed a bunch of stars in our youth, though nothing prepared us for his shine.

We made so many promises back then. Could we have known we wouldn’t be able to accomplish them all? The crux of youth. Unrealistic expectations. You think you’re invincible. And we were. For a time. But now this sparkly anniversary is on the horizon, the De La Rues asking if we’re returning as we’d promised, and Leo and I are in the dark. I doubt we can recapture what’s been lost. Vis Ta Vie and her charms won’t be able to heal us.

The sounds of the television distract me from the decision. It’s obvious the answer should be a flat-out no. But my mind begins to wander, like Leo and I on one of our many hikes. Had Renée reached out to Leo with the same letter? Would he show up?

The announcer of some trashy TV show spewing tabloid fodder says my name, and I turn in the direction of the screen. There I am, hiding my head under one of my mother’s wide-brimmed hats as the press and paparazzi follow me out of Publix. The banner at the bottom of the screen reads: Will Penny Shay talk to the press?

Then, our statement comes up on the screen. Leo's publicist penned it, and Leo approved. Did he really think I'd be a part of that? I know what's coming next and brace myself for the infamous picture to take over the screen. Three...two....one...but then in walks thirteen-year-old Cody, and I jump up to find the remote, sparing her from having to bear witness to her father's mistakes.

"Hi, Honey. How was school?"

She's crying, a line of tears sliding down her cheek.

"What is it?" I ask.

"Are you and Daddy getting a divorce?"

"We're booked!" Sienna Kravitz squeals into her cell phone. She would have preferred sharing the news directly with her best friend rather than her voicemail, but it appears as though she and Lucy's mailbox were closer friends these days.

"Did you book your flight? Plan to land in Charlotte around ten. That's when we get in. We'll drive together from the airport. I'm so excited, Lu, it's been way too long!"

She ends the call, trying to ignore the nagging sensation. And lately, there's been a collection of them. She tries Adam's cell phone again, but it goes directly to voicemail. That's what he does when he's in the city on business with important clients. Athletes. Managers. The whole business of the NFL made little sense to Sienna. But Adam was good at it, and being an agent allowed her to quit practicing law to stay home with the kids.

Now she's curled up on the couch, Julia and Sammie asleep upstairs, and she hugs the blanket tighter around her. The room is brightly lit—probably one too many lights—but she would sleep down here tonight if she had to.

Reading her mind as he often did, Adam calls.

"Hey, hon, I'm gonna stay in the city tonight."

He reminds her of the early meeting he has with one of his players. She understands. She always does. He sounds a tad buzzed, a slight slur to his words. Sienna's not a moron. She may not understand football, but she knows what happens at these dinners. The athletes and their egos, their alcohol and women, but Adam had always been devoted to her.

It was a joke amongst their friends. Their saccharine-laced relationship with adorable nicknames and constant affection. Sienna couldn't understand anyone complaining about "having to have sex" with their spouse. She and Adam were more connected than ever. And it didn't hurt that her husband looked as handsome as the day she met him in college—maybe even better looking—and...but she stops the train of thoughts.

"What'd you say, honey?" she asks.

"I said, 'What're you wearing?'"

She looked down at her sweatpants and one of his white T-shirts.

"Nothing," she lies.

"FaceTime me. I'm in the bathroom. It's one of those solo ones. The door's locked. It's just us."

She's tempted. His desire sends a rush through her.

And just as she's tugging the sweats down her thighs, exposing her red lace thong, he's there on her screen. "We've gotta get a second home, Sienna. Everyone here has a place for the summer. When the kids are at camp, we can be in the Hamptons. Or Aspen."

She wriggles the fabric back up, tying the strings around her waist as he drones on. His blue eyes have that glassiness she's become familiar with. And he didn't bother shaving for whoever he's trying to impress. She loves the scruff on him.

"I'm thinking Aspen. One of the guys has a plane, and we can use it whenever we want. Remind me when I get home to talk to some realtors."

"Sounds great, honey."

"Maybe we should think about private charters. It sure beats the shit out of commercial flying." And then he asks, "Why's the house lit up like a Christmas tree?"

He doesn't remember, and she lets it go. "I was reading to the kids. My eyes are getting bad."

"Don't forget to turn them off before you go upstairs."

"I won't." Because she had no plans to turn them off or go upstairs. And before they hang up, she asks, "Hey, have you heard from Henry lately?"

Henry is Lucy's husband. The four of them, the college musketeers. They'd been taking this trip to North Carolina, to Vis Ta Vie for years. But before Adam answers, she hears a knock through the phone. "Gotta go, hon. Love you all."

She loved him too. And she loved their life. But right now, she's more concerned about herself and Lucy. She dials her again. This time, she picks up.

"Oh my God, Sienna, you're never going to guess who I ran into tonight." She doesn't wait for a response. "Cole Wallace."

Cole was a friend of theirs from college. He had lived on their floor in both the dorm and their apartment. Cole was always the life of the party. 3:00 AM snow fights on the lawn, prank wars, flash mobs. Whatever it was, Cole was at the center of it. "I was at a bar with some of the moms from school, and they had a karaoke machine, and guess who stood up and sang *Flashdance*?"

The memory crashes into Sienna of Cole and his silly antics, but before she can comment on the encounter, she wonders about something else. "A bar? With the moms from school? Who is this Lucy and what have you done with the overworked therapist who's been too busy to talk to me lately?"

Lucy pauses. Sienna imagines her friend sitting in her Atlanta home while Henry is at his telescope studying the night sky. "I know. I'm sorry. I've been so busy with patients. Seems everyone has a crisis these days." But then she returns to Cole, and they take a short trip down memory lane. Life was easy back then, and they fall into the nostalgia of their youth. Momentarily, Sienna sheds her concerns.

"You got my message, right? You're going to meet us at the airport for the drive to Vis Ta Vie?"

Another pause. "Oh shoot. I forgot to tell you that we got on an earlier flight."

"What do you mean you got on an earlier flight?"

"It's not a big deal, Sienna. We'll see you at the inn." Lucy places her hand over the phone, but Sienna hears her muffled voice. "I'll be off in a minute." When she returns to the line, Sienna's not surprised when she says she has to go. "But we'll talk soon."

What does she mean, we'll talk soon? They spoke every single day. Or they used to. What is going on with her? They always made the drive together. That was their thing. And now she's going to bars during the week? They used to poke fun at the moms who needed to get lit during the week. Why does she feel so far away from her best friend? And it's more than the miles between Westchester and Atlanta.

She closes her eyes and tries to get comfortable under the blanket. The lights shine down all around her. Her mind races to last year at the inn, then to their college apartment. Engagements and weddings and babies. Hikes at Vis Ta Vie. Afternoons spent at the Grandfather Winery, rocking in their chairs by the river. Years and years of friendship. Maybe she's overthinking. People get busy. She and Lucy are like sisters.

She should be excited about returning to their happy place, and she will be.

But first, she has to get through tonight.

Francesca Roberts is the dream therapy patient. She's always on time, she's articulate and insightful, and she's willing to do the work. All that, plus she has fantastic insurance. Unfortunately, for all those in-office attributes, she struggles with real life.

I've been seeing Francesca for about a year now. Today she's lamenting about her boss. "I didn't get a finance degree from Penn to be treated like the help. Every time we have a client meeting, he asks me, and none of the men, to grab water and coffee. It's insulting."

"Have you tried to have the conversation with him?"

She shakes her head. "I freeze. I lose all confidence when I step through his office door."

"We've talked about this."

"I know." Francesca crosses and uncrosses her legs. She's thirty-two. Smart. She takes no issue in calling me out about a mistake on a bill or how I've contradicted myself in one of our sessions. She does it calmly, with an assurance that doesn't offend. A real master. But dealing with powerful men has been her Achilles heel. We'd been working on it for months.

She follows with a retelling of a recent visit to her parents' house. I'd heard the story the week before. I'm not the one paying, so I don't get to correct her when she repeats herself. She's describing the visit in excruciating detail, the interaction between her and her father, some big corporate hedge fund guy, and I'm off somewhere else. Which has been happening more and more frequently. I'm staring at Francesca, her lips moving, her raspy voice filtering through the air, but I'm not hearing a word.

"Do you agree?" she asks.

I sit up in the chair, pretending to write down a note. The yellow paper is empty.

Then she asks, “Did you hear me?”

Here goes.

“You’re not even listening!”

Francesca stands and paces along the gray carpeted floors. “How do you think this makes me feel? It’s your job to listen to me. You need to listen to me.”

These are the moments I’m most proud of our work together.

“I’m sorry, Francesca. You’re right. I got distracted. Our time together is valuable. It won’t happen again.”

I’ve learned in my practice, and in life, it’s best to own up to your mistakes and acknowledge others’ feelings. “I’m sure this didn’t feel good.”

She drops back into the blue velvet chair. “It doesn’t. But you’ve never done that before. I forgive you.”

“Did you see how you asserted yourself with me? Let’s talk about that next time.”

This is the cue for Francesca to thank me and get up to leave. And that’s what she does. “Thank you, Lucy,” like we’re old friends having lunch.

“See you next week,” I say.

When the door closes behind her, I drop the pad to the floor and my head in my hands. Therapists are supposed to have their shit together. I’m slowly breaking. It’s probably about time to make that appointment with my colleague Alicia. I can’t delay it much longer. Not when my own crises are affecting my work and patients.

I grab my cell phone from off the desk, and there’s Sienna’s name. Two missed calls. Normally, I’d dial her first, but nothing has been normal lately. Not with Henry, my husband, and not with Sienna and her dick of a spouse, Adam.

There. I said it. And it’s been a long time coming.

I used to worry when Sienna called me multiple times in a row. My mind jumped to something happening to one of the kids or to her. Today, I’m not in the mood to hear how they flew on a private plane to Vegas with one of his famous athletes.

Friendships change. People change. We can’t expect not to change along with them. Except I’m a therapist. Shouldn’t I know better? I counsel patients. I’m the supposed “expert” on friendship and relationship

management. I should know better than anyone how to manage stress loads and a growing host of problems. And poor Henry. He's dealing with so much. Head in the clouds, grasping at the stars for answers.

It would be easy to pretend everything is the same as it was when we were in college, but it's not. I remember the disappointment in Sienna's voice when I told her we weren't going to take the drive from the airport to Vilas together. If I wanted her to believe everything was okay between us, removing the one thing she counted on most was a mistake. It's going to be nearly impossible to keep this charade going, which is why we plan to end it.

To say it hasn't been a great year is an understatement. It's remarkable that Francesca is the first person to catch me averting my eyes, falling into the abyss. I've been in a trance for some time—ever since the dreadful phone call—and where Sienna used to be my constant, I've been pushing her away. And now she's on to me.

Vis Ta Vie used to be our happy place. I don't know how we'll be able to replicate the week-long stays spent at Renée and Jean-Paul's table. Something magical happened there. Maybe it's the food, maybe it's the copious amounts of wine, maybe it's stepping into the farmhouse and closing ourselves off from the rest of the world. Or maybe it's the strangers we meet, sharing gourmet meals prepared by a master chef.

Over the years, we've laughed so hard we've cried; we've met people from all over the world. And we drank. A lot. Some of the guests we've kept in touch with like the Laffertys and the Morgans. Others we hear about in the news. We never know who we'll get upon arrival; it's always a surprise. But the one thing we could count on is each other.

Now that's all going to change.

The chime pulls me out of my reverie, and I prepare for my next patient.

Focus.

Whoever says therapists are more messed up than their patients may be onto something.

Please let her be asleep.

Please let her be asleep in her bed.

Please, please, please let there be some modicum of peace under our roof tonight.

It's late. I jiggle with the key in the lock. She has to be asleep. And I'm starving. Not that she'd have left me anything to eat. I'm already thinking about the new recipe I found online. That's assuming she went grocery shopping this week.

I swing the door open and can already tell my prayers are lost. The sounds of the TV are blaring from the living room, and the house is dark except for the bright light of *Access Hollywood*.

"Cassidy," I say, staring over my mother's fully-clothed body slung across the couch. She's snoring loudly, so I know she's alive, and I spot the empty wineglass on the coffee table. I call out to her again, but I know how this is going to go. To save myself time and patience, I gently nudge her with my knee. And when that doesn't work, I shake her awake with my hands.

"Cassidy, you've got to wake up."

Last time I found her like this, I pulled a muscle in my back carrying her up to bed and undressing her. She still doesn't move, and I decide I don't care. Let her spend the night downstairs. Her inability to "parent" me is exhausting. I shut off the TV, turn on the alarm, and head for the kitchen.

Opening and closing the cabinets, I search for the ingredients for the vegetable rice I'm craving, but the shelves are mostly empty except for the tasteless bars she says she eats for *regularity*. I'll have to stop at the supermarket tomorrow after school. Grabbing the last two eggs from the carton, I toss them on a buttered frying pan, add a touch of salt, pepper, and expired milk, and hope I don't get food poisoning.

I love cooking, though this hardly constitutes gourmet. And since Cassidy and I switch off destinations every summer and this year's my turn to choose, I picked Vis Ta Vie. The pictures on the website showed a serene destination in the mountains of North Carolina, but the best part is the master chef who cooks for the guests each night.

Finally, a trip that doesn't involve biking through France or some health and fitness program in Malibu. The brochure mentions hikes and river rafting, which will excite Cassidy, but I plan on monopolizing Jean-Paul De La Rue's time learning culinary skills.

I scarf down the eggs and a cup of iced tea, jot down a shopping list, and make my way upstairs to my room. Cassidy's still snoring, and I think about recording her, but she didn't like when I did that last time. Closing the door, I drop my backpack on the floor, my brain still whirring from the math tutor.

Numbers perplexed me, but I know exactly how many days until our trip to Vis Ta Vie. Twenty-eight. Four weeks could not come any sooner.

I check my email, even though I checked it fourteen times today. Still nothing. I try not to let the disappointment seep in. It would happen. And I can't wait to see Cassidy's face.

Just as I'm about to doze off, I hear my door open and close. "Rosie baby?" I could feign sleep and avoid a conversation that'll only annoy me, or I can give her what she wants. And before I can decide, she lifts the covers and joins me.

"You stink like wine," I tell her.

"It was just a glass. I had a rough day."

My mother's days consist of spin classes and tossing food around her plate, pretending to eat. Her thin frame next to mine has me uncomfortable in my own bed.

"How was theater practice?" she asks.

"I wasn't at theater, Cassidy. I had the tutor."

"Oh, right." Her words are somewhat slurred.

"What do you want?" I ask.

"Can't I spend some time with my favorite daughter?"

"I'm your only daughter."

We're facing each other. The streetlamp outside my window highlights the whites of her eyes, her long, brown hair. I wonder what she sees when she looks at me. We are nothing alike.

"Can't we do this when I'm not trying to go to sleep? I have school tomorrow."

"Oh, right." She jumps up, remembering I'm fifteen and still require an education. Before she's out the door, she asks if I'm sure about Vis Ta Vie.

"Why wouldn't I be sure?"

"I don't know, there's just so many other places we could go—"

"Stop. I made my choice. I've never argued with you over your decisions, all those places with activities I can't stand."

"It's good for you to exercise, Rosie."

"Yes, I understand the virtues of exercise. I'm just not good at it."

"But you could be."

"And you could cook a meal every once in a while."

"I see what you're doing here. You've always been smart, Rosie."

I was. I am. And I'm resourceful too.

Cassidy sighs. "I just don't always understand you."

I lie back on my pillows and fix the bed where she messed it. I didn't understand her either.

"It just seems boring, that's all. And we have to sit at the table every single night with people we don't know. What if they hate us?"

She's never cared what people think about her. What she's really concerned about is that she'll be forced to eat, people watching her every move.

"And Vilas, North Carolina? I looked it up. There's nothing to do there. The closest Bloomingdale's is two hours away. You know I don't like small towns, Rosie. I like adventure. Big cities. Sweat Studio."

I close my eyes and count. Breathe in. Breathe out. I could tell her my news now, but I had planned to divulge it at the inn, after the email arrived. A safe, peaceful setting where she couldn't fly off the handle and embarrass us. Besides, she might appreciate the news.

No, I'll tell her when we get there.

It's the perfect spot.

And I want to hold onto my secret a little longer.

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THE STARS OF VISTA VIE

PART 2: SIENNA KRAVITZ

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**THE STARS
OF
VISTA VIE**

PART 2: SIENNA KRAVITZ

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“We’re booked!” Sienna Kravitz squeals into her cell phone. She would have preferred sharing the news directly with her best friend rather than her voicemail, but it appears as though she and Lucy’s mailbox were closer friends these days.

“Did you book your flight? Plan to land in Charlotte around ten. That’s when we get in. We’ll drive together from the airport. I’m so excited, Lu, it’s been way too long!”

She ends the call, trying to ignore the nagging sensation. And lately, there’s been a collection of them. She tries Adam’s cell phone again, but it goes directly to voicemail. That’s what he does when he’s in the city on business with important clients. Athletes. Managers. The whole business of the NFL made little sense to Sienna. But Adam was good at it, and being an agent allowed her to quit practicing law to stay home with the kids.

Now she’s curled up on the couch, Julia and Sammie asleep upstairs, and she hugs the blanket tighter around her. The room is brightly lit—probably one too many lights—but she would sleep down here tonight if she had to.

Reading her mind as he often did, Adam calls.

“Hey, hon, I’m gonna stay in the city tonight.”

He reminds her of the early meeting he has with one of his players. She understands. She always does. He sounds a tad buzzed, a slight slur to his words. Sienna’s not a moron. She may not understand football, but she knows what happens at these dinners. The athletes and their egos, their alcohol and women, but Adam had always been devoted to her.

It was a joke amongst their friends. Their saccharine-laced relationship with adorable nicknames and constant affection. Sienna couldn’t understand anyone complaining about “having to have sex” with their spouse. She and Adam were more connected than ever. And it didn’t hurt that her husband looked as handsome as the day she met him in college—maybe even better looking—and...but she stops the train of thoughts.

“What’d you say, honey?” she asks.

“I said, ‘What’re you wearing?’”

She looked down at her sweatpants and one of his white T-shirts.

“Nothing,” she lies.

“FaceTime me. I’m in the bathroom. It’s one of those solo ones. The door’s locked. It’s just us.”

She’s tempted. His desire sends a rush through her.

And just as she’s tugging the sweats down her thighs, exposing her red lace thong, he’s there on her screen. “We’ve gotta get a second home, Sienna. Everyone here has a place for the summer. When the kids are at camp, we can be in the Hamptons. Or Aspen.”

She wriggles the fabric back up, tying the strings around her waist as he drones on. His blue eyes have that glassiness she’s become familiar with. And he didn’t bother shaving for whoever he’s trying to impress. She loves the scruff on him.

“I’m thinking Aspen. One of the guys has a plane, and we can use it whenever we want. Remind me when I get home to talk to some realtors.”

“Sounds great, honey.”

“Maybe we should think about private charters. It sure beats the shit out of commercial flying.” And then he asks, “Why’s the house lit up like a Christmas tree?”

He doesn’t remember, and she lets it go. “I was reading to the kids. My eyes are getting bad.”

“Don’t forget to turn them off before you go upstairs.”

“I won’t.” Because she had no plans to turn them off or go upstairs. And before they hang up, she asks, “Hey, have you heard from Henry lately?”

Henry is Lucy’s husband. The four of them, the college musketeers. They’d been taking this trip to North Carolina, to Vis Ta Vie for years. But before Adam answers, she hears a knock through the phone. “Gotta go, hon. Love you all.”

She loved him too. And she loved their life. But right now, she’s more concerned about herself and Lucy. She dials her again. This time, she picks up.

“Oh my God, Sienna, you’re never going to guess who I ran into tonight.” She doesn’t wait for a response. “Cole Wallace.”

Cole was a friend of theirs from college. He had lived on their floor in both the dorm and their apartment. Cole was always the life of the party. 3:00 AM snow fights on the lawn, prank wars, flash mobs. Whatever it was, Cole was at the center of it. “I was at a bar with some of the moms from school, and they had a karaoke machine, and guess who stood up and sang *Flashdance*?”

The memory crashes into Sienna of Cole and his silly antics, but before she can comment on the encounter, she wonders about something else. “A bar? With the moms from school? Who is this Lucy and what have you done with the overworked therapist who’s been too busy to talk to me lately?”

Lucy pauses. Sienna imagines her friend sitting in her Atlanta home while Henry is at his telescope studying the night sky. “I know. I’m sorry. I’ve been so busy with patients. Seems everyone has a crisis these days.” But then she returns to Cole, and they take a short trip down memory lane. Life was easy back then, and they fall into the nostalgia of their youth. Momentarily, Sienna sheds her concerns.

“You got my message, right? You’re going to meet us at the airport for the drive to Vis Ta Vie?”

Another pause. “Oh shoot. I forgot to tell you that we got on an earlier flight.”

“What do you mean you got on an earlier flight?”

“It’s not a big deal, Sienna. We’ll see you at the inn.” Lucy places her hand over the phone, but Sienna hears her muffled voice. “I’ll be off in a minute.” When she returns to the line, Sienna’s not surprised when she says she has to go. “But we’ll talk soon.”

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She should be excited about returning to their happy place, and she will be.

But first, she has to get through tonight.

A SHORT STORY FROM *WE ARE MADE OF STARS*

THE STARS OF VISTA VIE

PART 3: LUCY ROSE-WALL

ROCHELLE B.
WEINSTEIN

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *THIS IS NOT HOW IT ENDS*



**THE STARS
OF
VISTA VIE**

PART 3: LUCY ROSE-WALL

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Francesca Roberts is the dream therapy patient. She's always on time, she's articulate and insightful, and she's willing to do the work. All that, plus she has fantastic insurance. Unfortunately, for all those in-office attributes, she struggles with real life.

I've been seeing Francesca for about a year now. Today she's lamenting about her boss. "I didn't get a finance degree from Penn to be treated like the help. Every time we have a client meeting, he asks me, and none of the men, to grab water and coffee. It's insulting."

"Have you tried to have the conversation with him?"

She shakes her head. "I freeze. I lose all confidence when I step through his office door."

"We've talked about this."

"I know." Francesca crosses and uncrosses her legs. She's thirty-two. Smart. She takes no issue in calling me out about a mistake on a bill or how I've contradicted myself in one of our sessions. She does it calmly, with an assurance that doesn't offend. A real master. But dealing with powerful men has been her Achilles heel. We'd been working on it for months.

She follows with a retelling of a recent visit to her parents' house. I'd heard the story the week before. I'm not the one paying, so I don't get to correct her when she repeats herself. She's describing the visit in excruciating detail, the interaction between her and her father, some big corporate hedge fund guy, and I'm off somewhere else. Which has been happening more and more frequently. I'm staring at Francesca, her lips moving, her raspy voice filtering through the air, but I'm not hearing a word.

"Do you agree?" she asks.

I sit up in the chair, pretending to write down a note. The yellow paper is empty.

Then she asks, "Did you hear me?"

Here goes.

"You're not even listening!"

Francesca stands and paces along the gray carpeted floors. "How do you think this makes me feel? It's your job to listen to me. You need to listen to me."

These are the moments I'm most proud of our work together.

“I’m sorry, Francesca. You’re right. I got distracted. Our time together is valuable. It won’t happen again.”

I’ve learned in my practice, and in life, it’s best to own up to your mistakes and acknowledge others’ feelings. “I’m sure this didn’t feel good.”

She drops back into the blue velvet chair. “It doesn’t. But you’ve never done that before. I forgive you.”

“Did you see how you asserted yourself with me? Let’s talk about that next time.”

This is the cue for Francesca to thank me and get up to leave. And that’s what she does. “Thank you, Lucy,” like we’re old friends having lunch.

“See you next week,” I say.

When the door closes behind her, I drop the pad to the floor and my head in my hands. Therapists are supposed to have their shit together. I’m slowly breaking. It’s probably about time to make that appointment with my colleague Alicia. I can’t delay it much longer. Not when my own crises are affecting my work and patients.

I grab my cell phone from off the desk, and there’s Sienna’s name. Two missed calls. Normally, I’d dial her first, but nothing has been normal lately. Not with Henry, my husband, and not with Sienna and her dick of a spouse, Adam.

There. I said it. And it’s been a long time coming.

I used to worry when Sienna called me multiple times in a row. My mind jumped to something happening to one of the kids or to her. Today, I’m not in the mood to hear how they flew on a private plane to Vegas with one of his famous athletes.

Friendships change. People change. We can’t expect not to change along with them. Except I’m a therapist. Shouldn’t I know better? I counsel patients. I’m the supposed “expert” on friendship and relationship management. I should know better than anyone how to manage stress loads and a growing host of problems. And poor Henry. He’s dealing with so much. Head in the clouds, grasping at the stars for answers.

It would be easy to pretend everything is the same as it was when we were in college, but it’s not. I remember the disappointment in Sienna’s voice when I told her we weren’t going to take the drive from the airport to Vilas together. If I wanted her to believe everything was okay between us, removing the one thing she counted on most was a mistake. It’s going to be nearly impossible to keep this charade going, which is why we plan to end it.

To say it hasn't been a great year is an understatement. It's remarkable that Francesca is the first person to catch me averting my eyes, falling into the abyss. I've been in a trance for some time—ever since the dreadful phone call—and where Sienna used to be my constant, I've been pushing her away. And now she's on to me.

Vis Ta Vie used to be our happy place. I don't know how we'll be able to replicate the week-long stays spent at Renée and Jean-Paul's table. Something magical happened there. Maybe it's the food, maybe it's the copious amounts of wine, maybe it's stepping into the farmhouse and closing ourselves off from the rest of the world. Or maybe it's the strangers we meet, sharing gourmet meals prepared by a master chef.

Over the years, we've laughed so hard we've cried; we've met people from all over the world. And we drank. A lot. Some of the guests we've kept in touch with like the Laffertys and the Morgans. Others we hear about in the news. We never know who we'll get upon arrival; it's always a surprise. But the one thing we could count on is each other.

Now that's all going to change.

The chime pulls me out of my reverie, and I prepare for my next patient.

Focus.

Whoever says therapists are more messed up than their patients may be onto something.

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PART 4: ROSALIE BANKS

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Please let her be asleep.

Please let her be asleep in her bed.

Please, please, please let there be some modicum of peace under our roof tonight.

It's late. I jiggle with the key in the lock. She has to be asleep. And I'm starving. Not that she'd have left me anything to eat. I'm already thinking about the new recipe I found online. That's assuming she went grocery shopping this week.

I swing the door open and can already tell my prayers are lost. The sounds of the TV are blaring from the living room, and the house is dark except for the bright light of *Access Hollywood*.

"Cassidy," I say, staring over my mother's fully-clothed body slung across the couch. She's snoring loudly, so I know she's alive, and I spot the empty wineglass on the coffee table. I call out to her again, but I know how this is going to go. To save myself time and patience, I gently nudge her with my knee. And when that doesn't work, I shake her awake with my hands.

"Cassidy, you've got to wake up."

Last time I found her like this, I pulled a muscle in my back carrying her up to bed and undressing her. She still doesn't move, and I decide I don't care. Let her spend the night downstairs. Her inability to "parent" me is exhausting. I shut off the TV, turn on the alarm, and head for the kitchen.

Opening and closing the cabinets, I search for the ingredients for the vegetable rice I'm craving, but the shelves are mostly empty except for the tasteless bars she says she eats for *regularity*. I'll have to stop at the supermarket tomorrow after school. Grabbing the last two eggs from the carton, I toss them on a buttered frying pan, add a touch of salt, pepper, and expired milk, and hope I don't get food poisoning.

I love cooking, though this hardly constitutes gourmet. And since Cassidy and I switch off destinations every summer and this year's my turn to choose, I picked Vis Ta Vie. The pictures on the website showed a serene destination in the mountains of North Carolina, but the best part is the master chef who cooks for the guests each night.

Finally, a trip that doesn't involve biking through France or some health and fitness program in Malibu. The brochure mentions hikes and river

rafting, which will excite Cassidy, but I plan on monopolizing Jean-Paul De La Rue's time learning culinary skills.

I scarf down the eggs and a cup of iced tea, jot down a shopping list, and make my way upstairs to my room. Cassidy's still snoring, and I think about recording her, but she didn't like when I did that last time. Closing the door, I drop my backpack on the floor, my brain still whirring from the math tutor. Numbers perplexed me, but I know exactly how many days until our trip to Vis Ta Vie. Twenty-eight. Four weeks could not come any sooner.

I check my email, even though I checked it fourteen times today. Still nothing. I try not to let the disappointment seep in. It would happen. And I can't wait to see Cassidy's face.

Just as I'm about to doze off, I hear my door open and close. "Rosie baby?" I could feign sleep and avoid a conversation that'll only annoy me, or I can give her what she wants. And before I can decide, she lifts the covers and joins me.

"You stink like wine," I tell her.

"It was just a glass. I had a rough day."

My mother's days consist of spin classes and tossing food around her plate, pretending to eat. Her thin frame next to mine has me uncomfortable in my own bed.

"How was theater practice?" she asks.

"I wasn't at theater, Cassidy. I had the tutor."

"Oh, right." Her words are somewhat slurred.

"What do you want?" I ask.

"Can't I spend some time with my favorite daughter?"

"I'm your only daughter."

We're facing each other. The streetlamp outside my window highlights the whites of her eyes, her long, brown hair. I wonder what she sees when she looks at me. We are nothing alike.

"Can't we do this when I'm not trying to go to sleep? I have school tomorrow."

"Oh, right." She jumps up, remembering I'm fifteen and still require an education. Before she's out the door, she asks if I'm sure about Vis Ta Vie.

"Why wouldn't I be sure?"

"I don't know, there's just so many other places we could go—"

"Stop. I made my choice. I've never argued with you over your decisions, all those places with activities I can't stand."

“It’s good for you to exercise, Rosie.”

“Yes, I understand the virtues of exercise. I’m just not good at it.”

“But you could be.”

“And you could cook a meal every once in a while.”

“I see what you’re doing here. You’ve always been smart, Rosie.”

I was. I am. And I’m resourceful too.

Cassidy sighs. “I just don’t always understand you.”

I lie back on my pillows and fix the bed where she messed it. I didn’t understand her either.

“It just seems boring, that’s all. And we have to sit at the table every single night with people we don’t know. What if they hate us?”

She’s never cared what people think about her. What she’s really concerned about is that she’ll be forced to eat, people watching her every move.

“And Vilas, North Carolina? I looked it up. There’s nothing to do there. The closest Bloomingdale’s is two hours away. You know I don’t like small towns, Rosie. I like adventure. Big cities. Sweat Studio.”

I close my eyes and count. Breathe in. Breathe out. I could tell her my news now, but I had planned to divulge it at the inn, after the email arrived. A safe, peaceful setting where she couldn’t fly off the handle and embarrass us. Besides, she might appreciate the news.

No, I’ll tell her when we get there.

It’s the perfect spot.

And I want to hold onto my secret a little longer.



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