

Chapter 1

The atmosphere in a room off the ballroom of the Hotel Pierre in midtown New York was fraught with tension as forty-five tall, rail-thin, bare-breasted models were getting their hair and makeup done, while simultaneously trying on shoes, and dresses for last-second alterations. David Fieldston was looking them over carefully, while a cameraman filmed him for a documentary on Fashion Week, and he explained the inspiration for his winter line. He was a stylish-looking man in his late forties, with gray hair, and he had been an important name in the fashion world for twenty years. Two years earlier he had been on the verge of bankruptcy, and the fashion press said his designs lacked energy,

his work was all déjà vu, and he was out of steam.

And now, thanks to a dynamo named Jenny Arden, he was back on the map. His last season had been his best one ever. His designs had taken off again, and his career with them. Every collection he'd done since Jenny Arden had begun advising him was vibrant, full of new, fresh ideas, and alive. He had taken off into the stratosphere and was better than ever, and privately he credited it all to her, and had told his closest friends and associates that she was a genius. Jenny was more modest about it, since she didn't do the actual designing, but she did research for him and came up with fresh inspiration for his line that made the collections exciting and really work. She met with him several times a week between seasons, and she was on hand, watching everything, when he presented the collection. And he paid her handsomely to do it. He wasn't Jenny's only client, but he was her most impressive success so far.

Jenny came by her love for fashion honestly, and had followed it since she was a small child. Her French grandmother had been a première in the haute couture ateliers in Paris, and her mother was a dedicated seamstress. They had had a small but respected business in Philadelphia while Jenny was growing up, where they had diligently

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copied the finest designs and gowns from the couture houses in Paris. And at eighteen, after watching them all her life, Jenny had gone to Parsons School of Design in New York hoping to become a designer. She had found the classes tedious to the point of agonizing, discovered she had no talent herself for the mechanics of draping and wrestling with fabrics, and no patience to do so. She was much more interested in the trends and the direction that fashion was going.

Her clients in recent years liked to say that she was psychic, and could smell a fashion before it happened. Jenny made it happen, and knew just what to do when it did. She was a style director, and a muse for the designers she worked for, and no detail was too small for her meticulous attention. Accessories, and the way a fashion was worn, were everything, she insisted. It wasn't enough to design a dress, a coat, or a hat – you had to turn it into a living thing, she insisted, that breathed on its own and was not just an object. She was passionate about what she did, and she infused her vision and energy into her clients, and that turned up on the runway when they showed their clothes, just as it was about to happen when David Fieldston showed his new line to the fashion press and store buyers during Fashion Week in New York. The

crowd was waiting breathlessly for the show to start. And while David was being interviewed, Jenny was doing her job, threading her way through the models, watching the hair and makeup with a keen eye, tugging a dress as it was put on, lifting the collar of a jacket, snapping a bracelet on a wrist, changing a shoe at the last minute.

‘No, no, no!’ she said, frowning, as dressers put clothes on a model as though she were a doll. ‘The necklace is on backward, and she has the belt upside down.’ She rapidly made the necessary changes, nodded, and sped across the room to a model who was being sewn into a see-through lace dress. They hadn’t had time to put the zipper in before the show. It happened all the time. And Jenny knew the dress would be a showstopper, you could see the model’s naked breasts and most of her body except what was concealed by a flesh-colored G-string, which kept the model relatively decent. David had been nervous about it, and Jenny had assured him that it was 1975 and the country was ready to see breasts, at least on the runway, if nowhere else. Rudi Gernreich had come to the same conclusion, and his bold designs were sensational and had been well received. *Vogue* magazine had been showing breasts for a dozen years, since Diana Vreeland introduced them when she was editor in chief in 1963.

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Diana Vreeland was Jenny's role model and goddess. Having realized that she didn't want to work on Seventh Avenue and be a designer to earn a living, Jenny had started out as an errand girl at *Vogue* when she graduated from Parsons eleven years before. She had eventually become the keeper of 'The Closet,' during Mrs. Vreeland's regime as editor in chief. Diana Vreeland had started at *Vogue* four years before Jenny got there. The Closet was where all the fabulous clothes were kept, and for a young girl inebriated by fashion, and in love with it since her earliest memories, it was sheer heaven. She got to see and touch all the beautiful things going in and out, and how they were put together for every photo shoot. Jenny soon caught the attention of the illustrious Mrs. Vreeland, and worshipped at her feet and became her senior assistant.

Then Jenny decided to leave the magazine five years after she'd arrived. Everyone said she was crazy, she had the perfect job. But she wanted to start her own fashion consulting business, to advise designers and style photo shoots on her own. And remarkably, the only support she got for her project was from Mrs. Vreeland, who secretly told her she was doing the right thing. And much to Jenny's amazement, Diana Vreeland left *Vogue* at almost

the same time. She had become a consultant to the Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and she was in the audience at the Pierre, waiting to see David Fieldston's show that day. She had been incredibly good to Jenny, who was unfailingly loyal to her in exchange. Jenny had easily recognized the senior editor's genius when she worked for her every day, and had learned much from her, although she had her own distinctive style.

Like a good puppeteer, so nobody would notice her as she worked the strings from backstage, she was wearing black from head to foot, as Mrs. Vreeland had. Jenny's long, shining dark hair swept her shoulders in a straight blunt cut, she wore very little makeup, and her huge blue eyes took in the entire scene. The models were almost dressed by then, and she was still watching them like a hawk, thinking of nothing else. And seconds later she could hear the ballroom go quiet and the music come on. They were opening with a Beatles song, to keep the mood light. The clothes they were showing were for the following fall season, seven months away, so store buyers could order them now. And no one in the ballroom cared that it was the beginning of February and snowing outside. Orders had to be placed months in advance.

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Jenny continued to watch the models, as they lined up and got ready to walk the runway. She was almost as tall as they were, minus the high heels. She was long and lean and beautiful herself, but she loved being invisible in this dazzling fashion world, always behind the scenes, making things happen. The producer of the runway show gave her a nod, and she signaled the first girl.

‘Go!’ she said, as their most beautiful model stepped through black velvet curtains onto the runway that ran the length of the ballroom and had taken two days to set up. It was made of copper, and Jenny had reminded the girls to be careful not to slip – no mean feat in six- and seven-inch-high heels. The shoes were only samples, usually made in just one size, as prototypes, pre-production, and often didn’t fit. And they had to make it look effortless as they crossed one leg over the other and sauntered down the runway. And if one of them fell on the slippery surface in the awkward shoes, it wouldn’t be the first time. Whatever happened, they had to keep going.

‘Go!’ Jenny signaled to each girl, making tiny corrections before they went out, as the first girls came back into the dressing room, and dressers stripped them and dressed them again. David Fieldston was watching

from a slight distance, and looked as anxious as he always did, but Jenny could tell from the applause in the ballroom that the show was going well. And he had designed a spectacular fall line, with Jenny's help. She had vetoed several things he loved, and suggested others, and luckily it all worked, and he always forgave her for her interference and sometimes-offbeat suggestions. It was what he paid her for, and her advice had been flawless so far.

Jenny stood back with a smile as David rushed past her and kissed her cheek on his way to take a bow, with the last model in a brilliant green velvet evening gown, at the end of the show.

'You did it again!' he whispered with a grin, and then ran out to the runway to join the models. The applause was deafening. Jenny had spun him into an icon in two short years, and turned his career around. And he was grateful to her for all of it. He took nothing she did for granted. And the best part about it for Jenny was that she loved her job. This was what she had always dreamed of doing, making fashion work. Not just designing pretty dresses, but actually creating fashion and making it make sense, memorable, and something every woman wanted to own.

Fashion had been her passion ever since she could

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remember, and now she got to create it every day. She could think of nothing better, as she put little pouches of safety pins and double-sided tape into her bag, put on her coat, and literally ran out the door. Her next show, for a brand-new client, was in two hours, in a theater downtown. Fashion Week was insane, and she loved every minute of it. She had done a show for one of her clients the day before, and had two more the next day. Designers rented restaurants, lofts, and theaters all over the city, or ballrooms like David Fieldston at the Pierre, to show their lines for the next season. And for someone like Jenny, it was a race to get there. Her new young designer, Pablo Charles, would be waiting for her breathlessly in an off-off-Broadway theater he had rented for his show.

Jenny ran across the lobby of the Hotel Pierre, carrying her heavy bag, as a tall, good-looking man ran behind her to catch up. He was even taller than she was, and snatched her bag out of her hand, as she turned to smile at him. It was her husband Bill, who had come to see the show. He tried to see them all, and he was always proud of what she did.

‘What do you keep in here? Rocks to throw at the press?’ he teased her, as he followed her through the door of the hotel onto the street. He was as fair as she was dark,

and very aristocratic looking, and he had been in love with her since the day they met. He had always said it had been fate, and she had finally come to believe him. It felt that way to her now too. There was a town car and driver waiting for her at the curb to get to the next show, and Bill slipped into the car beside her. He had taken the afternoon off so he could see both shows. He was her biggest fan. 'Great show, Jen. I loved the dresses at the end. So did the crowd. Suzy Menkes was smiling from ear to ear.' She was the most important fashion journalist of all. And Bill had noticed Mrs. Vreeland there too, as a gesture of affection for Jenny. She always came.

Jenny looked pleased at her husband's comments as he leaned over to kiss her. For a man who hadn't known one designer from another when she met him, she had turned him into a fashion aficionado, and he thoroughly enjoyed what she did, and all the excitement around it. Although it was total insanity for her, he loved all the hype and chaos around Fashion Week. It felt like carnival time to him, when the circus came to town. And he had learned to appreciate the talent and expertise of what she did. He had great respect for her, particularly knowing how hard she'd worked to get there, and she had done it all herself. No one had ever made life easy for her until he came

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along. It was all he wanted to do for her, and she had been just as good to him. They had been married for five years. And their bond to each other had strengthened with each passing year.

Jenny came from humble beginnings, which was something he respected about her, and particularly her mother, who hadn't had an easy time. Jenny's mother Helene had come to the States to try and find opportunities she couldn't in France in the turbulent days before the Second World War. She had arrived in New York in the spring of 1939, a penniless seamstress, hoping to find a job, which turned out to be not as easy as she thought. She was nineteen years old, spoke no English, and wound up working in a sweatshop on the Lower East Side, sewing beads on sweaters for pennies, barely making enough to eat and pay rent. Her own mother was a trained seamstress at the house of Chanel, working in haute couture after an apprenticeship of twelve years. Helene always said her mother was an artist, and readily admitted she didn't have her skill.

Life in New York had been harder than she thought. She had been almost ready to give up and go home when the war broke out in Europe in September, and her mother told her to stay where she was. Life was even more

arduous in France at the time, so Helene stuck it out at the sweatshop for three years, and then met a handsome young soldier on leave, at a party at the USO that a friend took her to in 1942. In the heat of passion and young love, and knowing he was shipping out, they married a week later, and Helene spent the rest of the war waiting for him to come home. Jenny had been born on a kitchen table on the Lower East Side in 1943. Her father came home two years later, and took his baby and war bride home to Pennsylvania. He had suggested to Helene several times while she waited for him that she live with his mother there, but she didn't want to go without him, and be among strangers. And by then she had friends in New York.

Nothing had prepared Helene for life in his hometown of Pittston, Pennsylvania, when Jack Arden came home. His family had been coal miners for generations, which he had told her, but she had had no idea what that meant, after growing up in Paris with genteel middle-class parents. Her father had been an art restorer and worked at the Louvre, her mother a talented seamstress who worked for Chanel. And Jack was a kind, loving man who adored Helene and treated her like a jewel. But they had no money, and his life was hard. He went back to his

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job in the coal mines where he had worked before the war, along with his four brothers and several cousins. Both his uncle and father had died in mining accidents years before, and his mother was a thin, sad woman who worried about her sons and cried all the time. And whenever there were strikes at the mine, Jack and Helene had no money at all. The weather was brutal, and sometimes all they had for dinner was bread and mayonnaise. Nothing he had said to her had warned her of the hardships of their life. But she never complained. She loved him too much to do so. What she remembered most about those years, when she talked about it afterward, was never having enough to eat, and never getting warm. Her mother-in-law had died the year they got there, and Helene couldn't get a job and leave Jenny alone.

Helene spent all her time taking care of her daughter and waiting for Jack to come home from the mine at night. They were both still very young. They wanted another child, but she miscarried several times, and they couldn't have afforded another child anyway. She missed France and longed to see her parents, but they had no money for her to go home. It was a miserable life, and the only thing that brightened it for her was her love for Jack, his tenderness with her, and the joy they derived from

Jenny. Jenny remembered her father as a big man who played with her and carried her on his shoulders and told her bedtime stories. She looked a great deal like him, judging from photographs when he was young. Her mother was small and fair and looked very French.

They had been in Pittston for three years after the war, when there was an explosion in the anthracite coal mine where he was working, and Jack was one of five men killed that day. He had been greatly respected and well liked, and the head of the mining company came to tell Helene. They gave her a small settlement, but it was enough to make a difference to her, along with a surprisingly decent life insurance policy Jack had taken out for her in case something happened to him. It was more than most of the men had to leave their wives. The two amounts together allowed Helene to move to Philadelphia with Jenny.

Helene's father had died two months earlier in Paris, shortly before Jack, and her mother was sad, living alone. She tried to get Helene to return to Paris, but jobs were scarce after the war, and she had been in the States for nine years by then, and didn't want to go back, and convinced her mother to join them in Philadelphia. Jenny was only five years old then, but she remembered moving

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from Pittston with her mother, and her grandmother arriving in the States to live with them.

The two women started a seamstress shop in Philadelphia after Thérèse, Helene's mother, arrived from Paris. Jenny had called her 'Mamie,' in the French tradition, and learned to speak French from her. The shop did well, and once one of the Main Line socialites discovered them, they became all the society ladies' 'best little secret,' copying Paris gowns for them. Thérèse's skill was remarkable, and Helene did the simpler work, lacking her mother's training. They made some beautiful dresses and earned a good income, which eventually sent Jenny to Parsons, where her own career began.

Jenny's first internship one summer, while still at school, was working for Oleg Cassini, during the time when he was making dresses for Jackie Kennedy when she was First Lady, and Jenny saw her there a few times, selecting designs for important occasions. Her mother and grandmother had been excited to hear of it, and proud when Jenny graduated, and landed the job at *Vogue*.

The two women were always excited to hear about what Jenny was doing. They subscribed to *Women's Wear Daily* just so they could read about her. Their little

couture shop and the money Jenny's father had left them had served them well. Bill had been incredibly impressed by Jenny when he met her, and even more so when he learned her history and met her mother and grandmother. He thought they were three remarkable women, and his wife most of all. The five years of their marriage had flown by, and he loved her more than ever. His life had been improved by her immeasurably, and Jenny insisted that hers had been too. He was supportive of everything she did. She was still at *Vogue* when he saw her first, on a snowy day in New York, when she was running a shoot outside the Plaza, and in spite of the weather, he had stopped to watch.

Jenny had been running around the models like a shepherd dog, herding them back to their places, as the snow fell. She was wearing a huge fur hat herself, which she later told him was a policeman's hat she had bought on the black market in Moscow, while on another shoot. And she was wearing jeans, boots, and a big down man's coat. Everyone on the set looked frozen, and Jenny was moving too fast to care, as she watched the photographer and models, and made constant adjustments to their clothing or their hair. Bill had noticed them, as he hurried past on his way to a meeting, and something

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made him stop. He liked to say that it was fate. He looked at Jenny and stood there for so long in the falling snow watching her that she turned and glanced at him, and he smiled at her. She smiled back as the snow landed on her lashes and the Russian fur hat. He just kept standing there, mesmerized by her, feeling foolish. He had just graduated from law school the year before and was working for his family law firm with his father and brothers, but he was bored by what he was doing, and everything about Jenny exuded joy.

He continued watching the photo shoot in front of the Plaza, getting soaked himself by the snow, and during a break he approached her, and could have kicked himself afterward for what he said. He felt like a moron, but he didn't know what else to say. He walked toward her and extended his card to her, and bumbled the words.

'If you ever need a lawyer . . .' he said, as she grinned.

'I hope not,' she answered, pocketing his card politely, and he had the distinct impression she would throw it away as soon as he left. Why would she need a lawyer? He didn't dare tell her how beautiful she was, or how mesmerized he was by her. His business card was the only thing that had come to mind as a way of telling her his name and how to reach him, not that she would. She was

watching the photographer out of the corner of her eye, as she talked to Bill for a minute, and then nodded and told Bill she had to go back to work. As he walked away, feeling desolate, he could hear her talking to the photographer in French. He was certain he would never see her again. And she hadn't told him her name or how he could reach her. She was concentrating on her shoot, and Bill was sure she thought he was an idiot, with his ridiculous comment when he gave her the business card. He was haunted by her for days and thought she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. She was full of life, and when he had looked into her eyes, he felt like he could see her soul.

He had his secretary call several magazines to see if any of them had had photo shoots in front of the Plaza that day, and he eventually found out that it was *Vogue*. A very unfriendly voice at the magazine said that if he left a message they would give it to her but they wouldn't give him her name. Feeling even more stupid and awkward than the first time, he asked the girl to say that 'Bill Sweet had called to say hello' and left his number. He was sure he'd never hear from her. And after that, he put Jenny out of his mind and went back to work. He was doing estate work for a client, and the prospect of doing

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that for the rest of his life was not a cheering one. But that was what the men in his family did. None of them seemed to mind it, and his brothers, both of whom were older than he was, actually liked their work, as partners of the firm. It was one of the most respected law firms in New York, and had been founded by his great-grandfather. They were blue bloods serving other blue bloods, just as they had for generations. It had never dawned on Bill to do anything else.

A week later, he was driving to Boston to meet with one of their clients, about setting up trusts for his grandchildren, when he stopped to get gas halfway there. It was March, it had been a long, bitter-cold winter, and it was snowing again. He got out of his car, while the attendant filled his tank, when a rental truck lumbered in, and a woman jumped out impatiently waiting for service. He watched her for a minute, and as she turned toward him, squinting in the snow, he saw the Russian fur hat again. And this time he was absolutely certain that their meeting was fated. How could he run into the same woman twice? He had thought he'd never see her again. He was smiling when he walked toward her, and she looked up at him in surprise. He acted as though they'd already met.

'I left you a message,' he said, looking at her cautiously,

‘but I don’t suppose you got it.’ He was smiling down at her, like a kid at Christmas, and feeling foolish again. He felt fourteen years old, while she looked so cool and poised.

‘I think I did.’ She smiled back at him. ‘You’re a lawyer, right? I haven’t gotten into any trouble yet.’ She still had his card somewhere in a coat pocket or on her desk. She remembered that his name was Bill Sweet. For some reason, it had stuck in her mind.

‘What’s with the truck?’ he teased her. ‘Are you driving away from a bank robbery, or moving furniture for a friend?’

‘I’m doing a shoot in Massachusetts.’ It was a story about an important socialite, being shot by a famous French photographer. ‘For *Vogue*,’ she added for good measure.

‘I tried to get in touch with you after I saw you at the Plaza. They wouldn’t tell me your name, which makes sense. I probably sounded like a stalker.’ She laughed at what he said, and the earnest look in his eyes. He looked like a nice guy, and she could see he was nervous talking to her, which touched her. Most of the men she met were sophisticated and blasé.

‘They’re used to stalkers where I work. Most of the

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time they're after the models, not the assistants,' she said with a wry look. Her fur hat was covered with snow again, just like the first time. He couldn't believe he'd actually run into her again. It was the best luck he'd had in years, possibly ever.

'Their mistake,' he answered her comment, as the attendant serviced her car. 'When are you going back to New York?' he asked her, feeling breathless. What if she said it was none of his business? He was a stranger, after all. It was a Thursday afternoon, and he was going back the following night, for the weekend. He had a date on Saturday with a girl he'd been seeing for a month, had nothing in common with, and didn't really like, but she was the younger sister of his brother's wife, and Bill had nothing else to do. He knew a thousand girls just like her, but not one like Jenny. He could already tell. Everything about her was exciting and different.

'It depends when we finish the shoot,' she said vaguely. 'Saturday or Sunday. I'm driving all the props up to dress the set. I'll be the last one to leave.' He was sorry he couldn't offer to drive with her. He had a feeling he would have enjoyed it. She looked like she laughed a lot. There was a twinkle in her eyes.

‘Would you like to get together next week?’ he asked bravely.

‘I would, but I’ve got three shoots back to back. That’s what I do. I style for the magazine, which means I’m in charge of a lot of their photo shoots, for the back of the book, the fashion section.’ He nodded, trying to pretend he knew what she meant, but he didn’t. And he could hardly concentrate when he looked at her. All he could see were her beautiful big blue eyes, her smile, and her sensual lips. And he couldn’t tell if she was brushing him off or was as busy as she said.

‘Do you get a day off?’ he asked, looking hopeful.

‘Once in a while. Not very often. It’s kind of like being married to your job.’ She looked as if she didn’t mind it, which made him curious about her.

‘Do you like what you do?’

‘I love it.’ She looked happy as she said it. ‘This is what I’ve always wanted to do.’

‘Drive a truck, delivering furniture?’ he joked, and she laughed.

‘Yeah, something like that. You can come to one of the shoots if you want. We’re doing two in a studio next week, and one on location in Harlem, at a nightclub called Small’s Paradise. We rented it for the night. I’ll

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probably get a dinner break around ten P.M. You can meet me there, and we can do KFC, or a funny Chinese place we eat at sometimes when we're uptown. It's a dive, but the food is terrific. I can't take long though. I've got four big models that night, they're flying in from London and Milan.' It sounded like fun to him. And he would have agreed to meet her on a subway platform, with or without food.

'Sounds good,' he confirmed, and she told him where to meet her on Thursday night, and said she'd call if anything changed. And then he thought of something he needed to know urgently. 'What's your name?'

'Jenny Arden. You can call me at *Vogue* if anything changes. I have a pager, but I only use it for work.' She never gave the number out.

'I won't call, Jenny Arden. See you Thursday night. Have fun on your shoot this weekend.'

They both paid for their gas, and she opened the door to the truck and got in. 'It's kind of funny we should meet like this,' she said thoughtfully as she looked at him, and he wanted to say it was something to tell their grandchildren, but he didn't dare.

'No big deal. I've just been following you for two months,' he said with a boyish grin, and she laughed.

‘See you Thursday,’ she said, and waved at him as she drove away in the snow. Bill was smiling all the way to Boston, and he could hardly wait to see her again. He felt like destiny had been very, very kind.

Their date the following week was typical of Jenny’s life while she worked for *Vogue*. Everything was moving slowly on the shoot. One of the models was sick, and the photographer had a temper tantrum. She didn’t get a dinner break till after midnight, and by then the Chinese restaurant was closed. Bill stood by patiently, and they went to Burger King for twenty minutes instead. He was fascinated by what she did, and stuck around for another hour, watching what happened on the set. He was impressed by how efficient she was. She had everything in control. He left around one-thirty in the morning, and when he called her the next day, to see how it went, she said they’d been there till four A.M. She said they worked all night sometimes, and as she and Bill got to know each other better, she explained that it accounted for the fact that she had no life except her work, but she didn’t seem to mind.

They dated haphazardly for the next few months, and they had a great time together. All other women paled by

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comparison, and he found he was learning everything he had never needed to know about the fashion world. But she made it interesting for him. And eventually, he admitted to her how little he enjoyed his own work.

‘Isn’t there something you can do related to the law that would be more fun?’ she asked sympathetically.

‘Not in my father’s firm. They’re the best tax lawyers in New York. I thought I’d like to be a litigator at one point, or do criminal law, but my father would never forgive me if I left the firm. And it must be me – my brothers love what they do. I do as much pro bono work as I can, with the indigent, and the ACLU, and through the courts, but my father isn’t too thrilled with that either.’ Bill was two years older than Jenny, but she seemed so sure about what she wanted to do, and was on her path. Most of the time he felt lost in the woods and off course. It embarrassed him to be so much less certain than she. She loved everything about her work, even the long hours and crazy situations she handled every day. None of it bothered her, and she enjoyed the challenge.

They’d been dating for two months, when he decided to take a theology class at Columbia. It was something he had always wanted to do. He didn’t tell his father or brothers, but he told Jenny, and she thought it was a great

idea. She was always encouraging and open to new ideas, and he admired that about her. In fact, he was crazy about her, and six months after they started dating, he was head over heels in love, and she admitted she was too. They had no plans to do anything about it – they just reveled in the time they spent together. And when he finished the theology class, he signed up for three more. He was taking them at night, so they didn't interfere with his work. But he was having much more fun at school at night than at his father's firm. By now he hated everything he did there. He had tried to question his brothers about it several times, but they both insisted they were satisfied and happy with what they did. They were both married, and their wives looked like all the girls they had grown up with. They were blond, blue-eyed debutantes, whose families had known their own for years. His older brother Tom's mother-in-law had gone to Vassar with their mother. And neither of Bill's sisters-in-law worked. And they'd each had two children. To Bill, they seemed like cookie-cutter lives, predictable from birth to the grave.

Jenny was so much more interesting and came from a totally different world. Her early years in a mining town, with a coal miner father, only made her more intriguing

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to him, and he was impressed by her success. She had come a long way from Pittston, Pennsylvania. And he thought her mother and grandmother were lovely women who were dignified and brave. He had gone to Philadelphia with Jenny and met them both, and they had been warm and welcoming to him, unlike his own family, who couldn't have been worse when they met Jenny. With considerable trepidation, he had taken Jenny to meet his parents at their Connecticut weekend home, over the Labor Day weekend, six months after they started dating.

His father was jovial with her at first, but Bill knew him better and saw something cold in his eyes. And his mother conducted the interrogation about where she had grown up, where she had graduated from college, and if she'd gone to boarding school. Jenny was open and honest and ingenuous with them. She told them about her father, and moving to Philadelphia. She said she had gone to public school there, then to Parsons, and she told them about her job at *Vogue*. To anyone else, it would have been a success story, and they would have been impressed. To his parents, her entire history was a crime, and dating their son made it even worse. His brothers looked at her strangely, and their wives had been

incredibly rude to her and ignored her completely. As far as they were concerned, a coal miner's daughter did not belong in their midst. If they had thrown rocks at her, their message wouldn't have been clearer. Bill was furious and humiliated by the time they left after dinner, and he apologized to Jenny profusely on the way back to New York.

'Don't be silly. They probably didn't know what to expect, and they don't meet people out of their own milieu very often. I deal with people like that all the time.' Some of the socialites they shot for *Vogue* were truly nasty to her and treated her like a slave. Her feelings were a little hurt this time, but Bill was so upset about it that she felt sorry for him. Clearly, she was not welcome with his family – they had made that clear – which was embarrassing for him. 'Don't worry about it,' she reassured him as they drove home. 'They were probably terrified you would say you're going to marry me,' she laughed. Bill pulled the car over and turned to look at her.

'Jenny, that's exactly what I have in mind,' he said in a gentle voice. 'I don't deserve you, and my family sure as hell doesn't. I don't care what they think, I want to spend the rest of my life with you. I love you. Will you marry

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me?’ Jenny stared at him with wide eyes. She knew they loved each other, but she had had no idea that that was what he was thinking. She knew the world he came from, and there was no way she could fit in. They would never accept her, and she was afraid that they would punish Bill if he married her.

‘What about your parents? They’d be heartbroken if you married me,’ she said sincerely with sad eyes. She didn’t want to destroy his life, but she loved him just as much.

‘I’d be heartbroken if you didn’t marry me.’ He was being honest. He had intended to ask her by the end of the year, maybe at Christmas. But he loved her so much, and wanted her to know how serious he was about her. His family’s shoddy treatment of her had made him want to speak up now. He kissed her then, even before she answered, and she looked at him solemnly.

‘Do you mean that?’ she asked him in a whisper.

‘Yes, I do.’ His eyes never left hers. ‘Jenny Arden, will you marry me? If you do, I will love you until the end of time.’ She smiled when he said it. He was so earnest, and such a good man. She had known from the very beginning that he was the one for her. And he had finally convinced her that it was destiny that they’d met. They

were perfect for each other, they got along, and the fact that their paths had crossed twice seemed like more than just happenstance or blind luck. They felt made for each other, whatever his parents thought.

‘Yes,’ she said in a tiny voice, with tears in her eyes. ‘Your parents will kill you, though. I didn’t go to boarding school, or Vassar. I was never a debutante, and I’m not blond.’ She was teasing him a little, but she had them nailed.

‘I don’t give a damn,’ he said, smiling, as he kissed her again. He was ecstatic, and she was smiling too. They were engaged! ‘I’m twenty-nine years old, and they’re not going to stop me from marrying the woman I love. And besides, they may have been rude today, but they have no right to interfere with us.’

As it turned out, he underestimated them. His father was outraged and discussed it with Bill in an icy tone. His mother had nearly fainted when he told them. ‘Are you *insane*? A *coal miner*’s daughter? Are you on drugs?’ And his brothers had begged him not to break their parents’ hearts. They said that Jenny seemed like a nice girl, but not someone he should marry. They told him he’d get over it, and when he assured them he was serious, his brother Peter had stormed out of the room and slammed

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the door, after telling him he had been a weirdo all his life, and now it was obvious he was nuts. Tom was more restrained, but clearly felt the same way. They acted as though he had told them he was planning to join a monastery or cut off his head. No one in the family had ever married someone who wasn't in the Social Register, and hadn't been a blue blood for countless generations. Bill didn't tell Jenny how bad it got or how rude they were, and their appalling behavior convinced him even more that he was right, and he didn't want to wait.

On Thanksgiving, he told them that he and Jenny were going to be married in January, in a small ceremony. They had decided to get married in New York, in a tiny church they loved. Her grandmother and mother were going to come, and there would be a lunch afterward. Bill's mother burst into tears, and Bill was grateful that Jenny wasn't there to hear it. She had gone to Philadelphia while he told them on his own. It was a painful weekend for Bill. They didn't sway him, but they made it as hard for him as they could. By Sunday, his parents said they would give a luncheon for them at their home after the wedding, providing they kept it small. They didn't want to lose him by boycotting the event, but

Bill had the feeling they would have planned his funeral with less despair. All of them were treating his marriage to Jenny as a tragedy. He was exhausted when he went home that night, and he spared Jenny the details of the weekend. He told her about the luncheon his parents were giving for them after the wedding. She had spent the weekend designing her wedding gown with her mother and grandmother. She wanted something very simple, but spectacularly beautiful for their big day. It was going to be absolutely exquisite, covered with incredibly delicate embroideries and tiny pearls, encrusted on antique lace. It was a gown that would have cost a fortune in Paris and would look magnificent on Jenny.

The wedding went off as expected. Bill and Jenny were radiant in the tiny church with a few friends. Her mother and grandmother were happy for her, though concerned about her unpleasant in-laws. And Bill's family was as chilly as possible to Jenny and her family and gave restrained toasts at the luncheon, that made their disapproval clear. Bill and Jenny were both relieved when it was over, and they went to the Bahamas for a week and had a wonderful time, although the atmosphere in the office was painful when he returned to work. They treated him like an outcast and never mentioned his wife,

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as though she didn't exist. And they wished she didn't.

It made Bill's next decision easier, when he completed the three theology classes he'd been taking. And as he did with everything, he told Jenny first. He wanted her approval before taking such a major step. He hoped to enter the seminary, get a master's of divinity, and become an Episcopal minister when he graduated. He had already explored the possibility, and he could do his coursework at Columbia. It would take three years, or four or even five if he stretched it out. He wanted to leave his father's law firm and go to school full time. It was a huge decision and a complete change of course. He had no idea how Jenny would feel about it, but he was sure now that it was right for him.

'I think I have a vocation,' he said, looking embarrassed. 'That sounds so holier-than-thou. But I've loved everything I studied for the past year. I thought about it a lot, and it feels so right. But I don't know what you think about being married to a minister.' He looked worried, but she smiled tenderly at him.

'Will you still love me when you're a minister?' she asked gently.

'More than ever,' he said, and kissed her.

'Will you object to my working in something as

superficial as fashion?’ She looked concerned, and Bill seemed startled by the question.

‘Of course not, silly. I’m proud of what you do. I’m not going to turn into some righteous prig if I become a minister. I just want to do some good in the world, and I think that’s the right way for me.’

‘I think so too,’ she said gently, ‘and I’m proud of you too. I think it’s a wonderful idea, if that’s what you want to do and it makes you happy. I’m behind you a thousand percent.’ She always was, which meant the world to him. He told her then that he was planning to quit the family law firm, and she was worried for him about the explosion it was likely to cause, and possibly a serious rift with his father and brothers.

‘I’m ready for it,’ he said calmly, looking wise and mature. Making the decision to do what he wanted had already grounded him. And he looked more peaceful and sure of himself than she had ever seen him. It was obvious to both of them that it was the right thing for him to do.

The ensuing explosion, when he told his father and brothers that he was leaving, was entirely predictable. He told them that he believed he had a vocation, which they

brushed off as immature and irresponsible. No man in the Sweet family had ever not become an attorney or quit the law firm, and none had ever joined the church. His brother Peter told him he was psychotic, and Tom just looked pained. And for good measure, they all blamed Jenny.

Bill left the law firm in February, and began his coursework at Columbia in March, toward his master's of divinity, and he had never looked back after that, or regretted it for a moment, although his family still acted as though he was doing something truly crazy, and even dishonorable. Bill stayed on his path, with Jenny's support, and stretched his studies to the full five years.

As they headed downtown to the second fashion show she was doing that night, he was five months away from graduation. He was going to be a minister. Jenny had encouraged him all along the way, just as he had done for her when she left *Vogue* and began consulting. And if anything, he had become more tolerant and compassionate over time. He had discovered that his strength was in the Arts of Ministry, which integrated psychiatry and psychology into the counseling he did. His gift was working with people in a religious context, rather than the drier areas of theology, church history, or Bible studies,

although he enjoyed them as well. But his real forte was in reaching out and offering comfort. Jenny was proud of how much he had grown in the past five years, and their marriage had never been better. All was well in their world.

Her grandmother had died two years after they were married, which had been a great sorrow to Jenny, and she still missed her. She thought of her while she was planning to give Bill a lunch when he graduated from Columbia in June, and wished Thérèse could have been there. Her mother was coming from Philadelphia. Helene still made dresses for her clients, though far less elaborate ones than Thérèse had made. But she made a good living at it and led a comfortable life.

They were going to invite his parents to the graduation, and Jenny was determined not to let them ruin it for them this time, as they had tried to do with their wedding. This was going to be Bill's big day, and she wanted everything to be perfect for him. She had been planning it for months.

He got out of the car with her, when they reached the theater that Pablo Charles had rented for his show. She had been there, planning the production with him until

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two in the morning the night before, and everything had been under control. It was organized chaos when Bill followed her backstage to where the models were putting on their clothes. Half of them were naked, and Bill no longer even noticed. He was so used to it, it seemed commonplace to him, and they were so emaciated, and most of them were so young, they didn't even look like women to him. Most of the girls they used as runway models were between fifteen and seventeen.

Pablo was frantically sewing a high embroidered collar onto a dress when they walked in, and he looked at Jenny in panic.

'The fucking thing just arrived from the embroiderer ten minutes ago. How do they expect me to get it on in time for the show?' He was desperate as Jenny told him she'd take care of it, and signaled to one of the women doing last-minute alterations and showed her how to put the collar in. She left her struggling with it on the model, and then sewed it quickly and expertly, as Jenny went to check on everything else. It was all in order, and even though Pablo was a bundle of nerves, she could see that his show was going to be a hit. He was a young Puerto Rican man with enormous talent, who had emerged as a major star in the past two years, in great part with Jenny's help.

‘Hang in,’ she told him when she saw him again. ‘It’s almost over, and the show is going to be fabulous. Trust me.’

Bill watched her as she raced around backstage solving problems, amazed, as he always was, at what she did. She was a magician, and she pulled rabbits out of the hat every time.

Bill kissed her before he went to the auditorium to take his seat. He was happy to be there with her, and give her the support she gave him. ‘See you after the show. Knock ‘em dead!’ he whispered to her, and then went to find his place among the buyers and the press. He recognized most of them now, and enjoyed talking to some of them. It was a world he found interesting at times, and he loved seeing how respected Jenny was in her field. It was richly deserved. She was a talented woman, and she worked hard. She had climbed the mountain all by herself, under her own steam. The coal miner’s daughter from Pittston, Pennsylvania, had become a star in the fashion world. It had taken her eleven years to get where she was today, and three before that at Parsons. It had been a long, hard, dedicated climb to success.

As he sat down in the audience, squeezed on either side by buyers from the Midwest, he was thinking about

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Jenny and smiled to himself. He was a happy man, deeply in love with his wife, and they were both pursuing careers they loved. You couldn't ask for more than that, except for a family of their own one day. They talked about it a lot. But for now, the blessings they shared seemed abundant to them.