



# The Christmas Plan

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**Category:** Romance, Lesbian Romance

**Description:** Ari Graves has a plan: attract new clients and take her talent agency career to the next level by hosting an all-out holiday networking party.

But to pull it off, she's going to need help from everyone she knows. Leaning on her girlfriend, Cass Owens, and her best friend, Tommy, Ari calls on the city sapphics to invite their most prestigious contacts. Famous tennis players Taylor Young and Mackenzie Bennett are still navigating their out and very public relationship.

Could a change in management be key to the next phase of Taylor's career?

When photographers Drew Hudson and Rose Miller are hired to work the party, the couple are forced to examine what's next in their artistic lives.

Can Rose expand out from her event photography? And can Drew diversify their style enough to take a new gig?

With the party looming ever closer, can these three couples come together to make some holiday magic?

**Total Pages (Source):** 28

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:31 pm*

1

ARI

The hustle and bustle of Midtown was almost too much. But with Cass's hand wrapped around Ari's, she was brought back down to the concrete under her feet.

Settling into a spot just around the ice rink at Rockefeller Center, Ari leaned against the railing and looked over at the unlit Christmas tree.

"You good?" Cass whispered in her ear as she put her arms on either side of Ari's body, gripping the railing.

With a nod, Ari looked over her shoulder and planted a kiss on Cass's cheek. "This is the most touristy thing I've ever done." It was true, but it wasn't the only thing occupying her mind.

Cass giggled. "Well good. Sometimes things are touristy because they're cool."

Looking over at the Tree, which towered over the gathering crowd as the sky grew darker by the second, Ari laughed. Cass wasn't wrong... but then again, when was she ever?

They'd been together for just over six months but Ari already felt like she could see their entire lives laid out before them. It was hard for her not to get giddy about all of it, to know that there was a whole world for the two of them, just waiting for them to grab it.

Of course in order to grab it, Ari would have to make more money. Having a wedding, kids, or a house was not cheap business. And although her client list had gotten more dynamic, she was still missing that killer client that would really cap it off.

“I’m so excited.” Cassie bounced up and down, partially to warm up from the cold, December evening and partially from anticipation.

Leaning back into Cass’s body, Ari smiled. “Me too.”

All around Rockefeller Center, massive, fake Christmas ornaments decorated the buildings. LED snowflakes illuminated each lamppost. Smaller Christmas trees lined the edges of the square.

It was undeniably magical. There was a joy in the air that made Ari’s chest grow warm under the bulky wool scarf.

“Look over there.” Cass pointed to a woman and her daughter ice skating in the rink below us. They held hands and laughed as they took each turn clumsily.

Giggling, Ari’s head fell back onto Cass’s head. “That’s so sweet.”

When she looked up from the rink, the Center was completely packed.

After a moment, the spotlight on the tree faded – dropping it into darkness. The crowd, full of regulars, started a countdown without further prompting.

“5...”

Cass’s voice sounded from behind Ari, her chest rumbling against Ari’s.

“4...” The crowd grew louder, the anticipation building.

Ari swallowed as she joined in. “3...”

“2...”

“1...”

Like magic, the towering, eighty-foot tree burst into extravagant color. There wasn't a single dark spot on the magnificent Norwegian Spruce. The crowd burst into cheers as Rockefeller Center turned into a winter wonderland.

“Wow...” Ari's jaw dropped as she watched the twinkling lights. A part of her couldn't believe that it was as incredible as it had been hyped into. But yet, here it was.

Cass giggled. “Right?”

Shaking her head, Ari couldn't even find the words. But as she searched for them something else came to mind.

“Wait, this is perfect.”

Cass's forehead wrinkled. “I think so too.”

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:31 pm*

Turning around in Cass's arms, Ari faced her girlfriend. "No, Cass, not this... Well, this is perfect. But I have an idea."

"Go on." Cass giggled while pursing her lips.

"I need a big client." Ari scoffed like it was all so obvious.

But this only prompted Cass to scrunch her face up more. "Yes?"

Ari put her hands on Cassie's shoulders. "Right, and Christmas is the perfect time to get people feeling cozy and generous."

"Okay?" Trying desperately to follow along, Cass's blue eyes flicked across Ari's face.

"A holiday party. Get a bunch of new and old clients to attend and get them signed before the New Year." Ari snapped.

Cass smirked. "Now I get it!"

Biting her lip, Ari's mind started churning. "It would be the perfect chance to invite Hazel Ford."

"And to get some of your older clients around to chat about the future." Fully in it now, Cass nodded. But her face turned sour. "Ari, one problem. It's already December 4th."

“Shit.” Ari’s head dropped. It was the one thing she’d forgotten to consider. “I guess that settles it. No way I can get that together before everyone leaves town.”

Hating defeatism, Cass scoffed. “Hold on, when did Ari Graves become such a quitter?”

Ari shook her off as her shoulders dropped. “Cassie, seriously. How would we manage that?”

“I’ll help. Besides, Tommy will definitely be in. It’s a great idea.” Putting her hands on Ari’s biceps, Cass smirked. “If anyone can pull it off, it’s you.”

She wasn’t wrong. Ari had pulled off some incredible feats in the last couple of months. When they’d first met, Ari was on the brink of getting let go. And in the six months since, she was almost being offered a partner position.

Chewing the inside of her cheek, Ari looked back into Cass’s eyes. “Do you really think so?”

“I do.” Cass nodded, confident as always.

Ari’s throat tightened. If she was lucky, she’d hear Cass say those words again in the future.

Shaking off the distraction, Ari looked down at her watch. “If we’re going to do it, we have to start tonight.”

Cass reached her hands down and grabbed Ari’s hand, already pushing through the crowd to get out of the crowded park.

But Ari stopped in her tracks. “I’m so sorry, this is supposed to be a cute, romantic

date. I don't want to drag us into a work thing."

Looking back at Ari, Cass's lips curled into a smile as she squeezed Ari's cold hand. "You're not dragging me. We started this whole relationship to get you ahead in your career. I'm in."

"You're sure?"

"Positive." Cass tightened her grip on Ari's hand and pulled her toward the street.

The crowd parted for them as they moved; New Yorkers knew better than to get in the way of busy women.

By the time we reached the subway station, Ari could hardly believe what she was doing. They'd need a venue, decorators, caterers, photographers on short notice... and during the busiest party season of the year.

It was going to be nearly impossible.

But with Cass by her side, Ari just might be able to pull the plan off. The only way to find out was to jump in head first.

2

DREW

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:31 pm*

Drew never wanted to leave the warmth of this bed. Holding a cup of apple cider in their hands, Drew looked over their shoulder when the camera clicked from behind them.

Even sitting up, the warmth of Rose's body lingered on their skin.

"There's no way this is a good shot." Drew shook their head.

Giggling, Rose repositioned herself behind them. "Trust the vision, you'll see them in the darkroom."

Before they could say anything else, a buzzing came from the nightstand on Drew's side. Their phone screen lit up, reading: Ari Graves.

Rose passed it over the bed, holding the film camera in one hand.

"Thanks." Drew groaned as they grabbed the phone. "What the fuck does she want at this hour?"

It wasn't even that late, but it was after dark and Ari typically only called during business hours. They could only assume a call like this warranted some kind of photography emergency.

Sliding their finger along the screen, Drew brought the phone to their ear. "Sup, Graves?"

"I knew you'd answer." Ari's voice sounded through the device.



Drew shrugged. “What else would I be doing? What do you need?”

There was a pause on the line. Shooting a look behind them at Rose, who wore an oversized button-down with a single button done, Drew raised an eyebrow.

Ari sighed. “This might be crazy.”

“Tell me more.”

“Are you booked on the 21st?”

Their forehead wrinkled. “Of what month?”

But when Ari didn’t answer, Drew scoffed. “Ari, you have to be kidding.”

Laughing, Ari continued, “I wish I was. Set your rate, I’ll pay it. I’m hosting the hottest, client holiday party in town that Saturday. I need the best photographers in the city.”

“Well, you might be calling the wrong person.” Drew shook their head as they looked back at Rose and rolled their eyes. “Rose, what are you doing on the 21st?”

Rose’s jaw dropped as she tried to comprehend the timeline. But once she got her bearings, she nodded. “Whatever Ari has planned, apparently.”

With a laugh of disbelief, Drew shrugged. “We’re in. God, I wish I hadn’t met you at that fucking wedding.”

“Don’t lie, Santa might hear you.” Ari chuckled. “I’ll be in touch with more details soon.”

The line went dead before Drew could say anything else.

A part of Drew couldn't believe this was happening. They'd first met Ari running to find Rose in the middle of a wedding. They were flustered, rude, and panicked. But after Rose and Drew finished the shoot, they got to chatting during the reception and hit it off.

They'd met up a few times since then for drinks.

Turning around in the bed, Drew bit their lip. "Can you believe this woman?"

"Yes, I can." Rose rolled her eyes, a smile playing at her cheeks. "So, another event shoot?"

Drew nodded as they crossed the sea of sheets and pushed Rose back into the mattress.

Giggling as she fell back, Rose's eyes flicked down to Drew's lips. "What's the big idea?"

Drew found their way on top of Rose, looking down at her as they clenched their jaw. "You're an incredibly talented artist. Events pay the bills, right?"

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:31 pm*

“Right. But you manage both.” Rose eyed them.

Nodding, Drew lowered themselves to Rose’s ear. “Only after a decade of floundering. Besides, it’s a client party which means there’ll be a bunch of agents hunting for talent.”

Rose considered it for a moment before groaning and throwing her arms around Drew’s neck. “Stop being right, and kiss me instead.”

“Yes, ma’am.” Drew laughed as they brought their lips to hers. From the corner of their eyes, the Christmas tree twinkled on the other side of the loft. Rose's place was far too small for a tree, so instead she had insisted Drew get one for their place and Rose would help decorate it.

Drew couldn’t lie: it was the coziest the loft had ever been. But it had created one problem: they never wanted to leave this bed with Rose. And that might be a problem with an incredibly rushed holiday party looming.

3

MACKENZIE

The needles pricked her hands as Mac grabbed the trunk of a modest Balsam Fir. “What about this one?”

Whipping around from the other trees, Taylor pursed her lips. “Hm. I like it, but I’m not crazy about it.”

“Honey, you’re going to have to pick one eventually.” Mackenzie laughed as she walked over to Taylor, throwing her arms over her shoulders.

Taylor’s long, blonde hair draped over her shoulder. A pair of black earmuffs covered her ears as her cheeks grew rosy from the chilly, winter wind. “Can’t hear you.” She winked as she pointed to the fluffy headband.

Lifting the muffs and bringing their lips closer, Mac lowered their voice. “You know I would lift every tree on this sidewalk for you a thousand times and scratch my palms until they bled. But you do still have to pick one.”

With a heavy sigh, Taylor’s shoulders dropped under her heavy coat. “Fine. But only because I need you to be able to play the charity match.”

“Sounds about right.” Mackenzie winked as she dropped the tree back into the pile. Moving a few feet down, Mac browsed the taller trees. Taylor’s apartment was plenty big for a big one.

Mac reached into the pile and pulled out a nine-foot tree. Hauling it out of the pile, she threw the stump down onto the concrete. “Now we’re talking.”

A goofy grin took over her face as she looked up at the Fraser Fir, her hand holding the trunk deep inside the needles.

Smiling at it, Taylor nodded. “Oh, that’s perfect.”

“Right?”

“That’s it.” Taylor shook her head, her eyes getting glossy.

Before Mac could comfort her, the woman manning the tree shop came up to them.

She wore orange work gloves and a flannel. “Are we happy with this one?”

Shaking off her emotion, Taylor pointed to the tree. “Yes, we are.”

The woman scanned Taylor and Mac’s faces for a moment, a light of recognition coming to her eyes. Reaching into the trunk, she took the tree from Mac and threw it over her shoulder as she walked back to the tree netting station.

Taylor walked over to Mac, putting an arm around her waist as they walked over to the woman. Holding a chainsaw, she cut off the bottom few inches of the trunk to give the pine tree a fresh base.

As Mac watched, she felt a buzzing come from her pocket. Her forehead wrinkled as she dug her hand into her pockets, buried under the heavy, wool cocoon coat.

When she finally pulled it out, the screen read: Tommy.

“Sorry, let me take this.” Mac smiled at Taylor as she answered the call. “Hey, Tom. What’s up?”

Tommy cleared her throat. “Hey, Bennett. I have a question for you.”

Wrinkling her forehead, Mac laughed. “Okay, shoot.”

“You busy on the 21st?”

Mac flipped through her mental calendar, trying to picture the date which was a little over a week away. “I don’t believe so. Why?”

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:31 pm*

“Are you with Taylor?” Tommy paused.

“Yeah, but you’re not on speaker.” Looking over at Taylor, Mac watched as she browsed the cheap ornaments hung on the side of the wood shack. It was a New York City tradition, small tree shops would pop up all along the sidewalks throughout the city. Sure, it made the walkways even more crowded and narrow.

But it turned the entire metropolis into a magical, winter wonderland.

Tommy sighed. “Great. There’s a holiday party my friend is hosting. It’s going to be a huge recruitment effort for a lot of agents and managers. You should come... and bring Taylor.”

“Right.” Mackenzie nodded, getting the message.

“My friend Ari Graves is hosting it. We work together at SDO and she’s a fantastic agent. Might be a good fit for your girl.” Tommy was hesitant to say more, knowing it was a delicate subject.

But as Taylor walked closer, Mac knew she needed to get off the phone. “Alright, I’ll take a look and see what I can do.”

Mackenzie hung up the phone just as Taylor was walking over and throwing her arms over Mac’s neck.

“Tree’s ready.” Leaning in for a kiss, Taylor pressed her warm lips against Mac’s.

“Perfect.” Mac smiled as she walked over to the woman, passed her a wad of cash, and threw the tree – now tightly wrapped in an orange net – over her shoulder.

It was far too swift of a motion for Taylor to keep up. She gawked at her girlfriend. “Damn, I was going to offer to carry it.”

Looking over her shoulder as she made her way down the sidewalk, Mackenzie wiggled her eyebrows. “Don’t worry about a thing, darlin’.”

Taylor caught up to Mac, sidling in next to her treeless side. “So, what did Tommy need?”

Swallowing hard, Mac shrugged. “She invited us to an agency holiday party. Apparently, it’s a big mixer for the clients. Would you want to go?”

“When is it?”

Mac adjusted the tree on her shoulder. “Next Saturday.”

From the corner of her eye, Mac watched Taylor bite the inside of her cheek. She’d been rather avoidant about finding new representation, not wanting to scorn her own mother too hard. But Kim had yet to be supportive in any real way.

Hell, even the charity match had been a fight.

After a moment, Taylor nodded. “Yeah, that would be nice.”

A part of Mac was surprised, but she did her best to hide it. Taylor should have been more suspicious considering how bad of a liar Mac was.

With the pine needles digging into her shoulder, Mac smiled. “We should get you

something to wear.”

Winking, Taylor licked her lips. “Want to help me pick?”

4

CASS

A part of her was annoyed by the clicking of the pen, but Cass couldn't stop herself from pressing it over and over again as she stared at her computer monitor.

The soundwaves and track numbers had started to blur together on her screen.

With a heavy sigh, Cass rose from her desk chair in Ari's apartment and paced toward the kitchen. A mess from making lunch still sat on the counter.

Grabbing a paper towel and some cleaner, Cass sprayed down the marble as she bopped her head along to an imaginary beat. She'd quit her sound mixing job a few weeks ago, hoping to get back into music production.

But while she waited for responses to her resume drops, Cass needed to refresh herself on all things music-making.

With each swipe of the dirty surface, Cass let her brain unfold a new beat. She swayed her hips as she tried to find the rhythm – the missing puzzle piece of her most recent experiment.



## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:31 pm*

The sound of keys in the locked door startled her out of her haze.

“Honey, you home?” Ari called as she pushed into the apartment. Stopping in her tracks, Ari raised an eyebrow as she scanned Cass’s body. Dressed in a long, oversized flannel and skimpy boxers, Cass knew she looked tempting. “Yes, you are.” Ari swallowed.

Rolling her eyes, Cass leaned against the now-cleaned counter. The cold stone sent a wave of relief through her tired hands. “You’re home early.”

Ari licked her lips as she tossed her Chanel bag on the floor, crossing the distance between them in a matter of seconds. “Is that a complaint I hear?”

“No, sir.” Cass felt her eyelids growing heavy as the thought of Ari’s touch grew closer.

Putting her hands on Cass’s waist, Ari’s eyes flicked from her mouth to her stunning blue eyes. A light whimper escaped Cass’s lips as Ari’s cold fingers pushed against the fabric of her shirt.

Ari smirked. “I got to leave early so I could work on the venue.”

Taking a step back, Cass shrugged. “Well, I guess since you’re home to work, I should keep my hands to myself.”

“Did I say that?” Ari pulled Cass closer, tugging on the flannel.

With a wince of pleasure, Cass shook her head. “Maybe not.”

A laugh rumbled from Ari’s chest as she pinned her hands to the counter, trapping Cass between her arms with her ass pressing into the cold marble behind her.

“I missed you,” Cass whispered as her head fell back.

Pressing her lips into Cass’s neck, Ari grinned. “I missed you too.” But as she teased the flesh with her lips, tongue, and teeth, Ari’s eyes caught on the Christmas tree glowing from the living room. At the base, a perfectly wrapped box sat under the branches. “What’s that?”

Trying to stop herself from thinking about her pulsing center, Cass looked over her shoulder and smiled. “Santa left that. But you’re going to have to wait to open it.”

Ari scoffed and released Cass before leaving the kitchen. The gift was in a sleek, gold and black snowflake wrapping paper with a faintly glittery gold ribbon.

But before Ari could reach for the gift, Cass’s long, elegant fingers wrapped around her wrists. “Naughty girl.”

Turning around, Ari’s jaw tensed with excitement.

Cass’s chest rose and fell quickly, her own anticipation growing. Looking at Ari, it felt a little unfair how clothed she was. Here Cass was, essentially naked. And there, Ari stood with her wrap coat and tailored trousers.

Releasing her grip on Ari’s wrist, Cass moved her hands to the stomach where the tie of the jacket rested. With one tug on an end, the jacket came undone – exposing Ari’s tucked-in blouse.

“I love this shirt,” Cass confessed as she bit her lip. It was a simple top, nothing particularly special about it, except for how the v-neck of the shifting chiffon exposed Ari’s lush breasts.

Ari laughed. “You would. But I think it looks better down there.” She nodded toward the floor and let her hands move on to Cass’s hips, lifting the fabric of the flannel enough to touch her bare skin.

Cass worked her hands over Ari’s shoulder, slipping the wrap coat off and letting it fall to the floor. Her breath grew ragged with each movement, pulses of pleasure shooting down to her folds. Without waiting, Cass grabbed the chiffon hem of the blouse and pulled it up, guiding it over Ari’s shoulder and head.

Following orders, Ari lifted her arms for Cass. Once the shirt was on the ground, tossed a few feet away, Cass shook her head. “Wow.”

Standing at the center of the living room, Ari’s toned body came into view. Her soft abs tensed in the slightly colder room, goosebumps rising on her skin as she looked back at Cass. In a simple, black bra, her chest looked warm and plush.

Her hair, up in a neat bun, was out of her face.

Ari giggled and walked closer to Cass, letting her fingers get to work on the buttons of Cass’s flannel. But before she could get too far down, Cass walked toward the couch. Pulling Ari along with her, Cass put her hands on Ari’s shoulders and pushed her down.

Sinking into the luxurious couch, Ari groaned as she made contact with the fabric.

Cass lowered herself to the floor, her knees pressing into the shag carpet. It wasn’t the usual piece in the living room, but Ari specially ordered the white rug for

Christmas. And as Cass's skin rested on the soft floor, she was grateful for it.

"Cass, fuck." Ari groaned as Cass's hands moved toward the designer belt looped through her trousers.

With a chuckle, Cass unbuckled the leather and unzipped the pants. Her hand moved along the waistband, slowly pulling them lower. Ari lifted her hips.

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:31 pm*

“Thanks, darling.” Cass winked and she tugged the trousers over Ari’s ass and down her legs. Letting them drop to the floor, Cass brushed her hands up Ari’s smooth legs. Her fingers dragged toward Ari’s soft thighs.

Ari’s body tensed under her girlfriend’s touch. Moving the purple lace panties still clinging to Ari’s center, Cass’s hand met her center, lightly pressing into the folds. Within moments, Ari’s slick excitement met Cass’s fingers as she massaged the area in broad strokes.

“Oh my god, you’re excited.” Cass licked her lips.

Nodding, Ari laughed. “Of course I am. I come home to this? I might need to keep you unemployed forever.”

It would be a lie for Cass to say the idea was exciting to her. Having a sugar mommy to take care of her was a dream come true. She’d been busting her ass for years and having a break had been incredible.

But before she could get too distracted by the idea, Cass decided to show Ari exactly what she brought to the table. She grabbed the lace around Ari’s hips and tugged them down, over her ass and onto the floor where they met the puddle of trousers.

Cass lifted Ari’s hips to the edge of the couch, positioning her wet slit right where she wanted it. Her mouth watered at the sight, wanting nothing more than to bury herself in Ari’s lush entrance for the rest of the night.

Not wanting to wait any longer, Cass let her tongue lick from Ari’s knees all the way

to her hardened clit. She brought her hands around to Ari's ass and hips, pulling her closer with each caress of her tongue.

Applying broad pressure, Cass took in all of Ari. With a moan, Cass pulled away just enough to whimper, "You taste amazing."

Ari groaned with pleasure as her hand fell on Cass's shaved head. There wasn't much to grab but Ari's long, elegant fingers were warm on her crown.

As Cass increased her pressure, Ari's hips started to grind along with her girlfriend's tongue. Finding a perfect sync, Cass lowered her mouth to Ari's center. Once she felt Ari's entrance under her tongue, where a collection of excitement had pooled, her eyes rolled back.

Without a moment's hesitation, Cass sunk herself deep inside Ari. She didn't have the patience to wait any longer, having thought about this moment for hours while she was home alone.

"God, fuck." Ari's throat let the guttural cry rip out of her as she sunk farther into the sofa, letting it absorb all of her.

Cass let her nose press into Ari's hard clit, massaging it as her tongue licked deep inside her.

It wasn't long before Ari's body started to tense under her touch.

Tightening her grip on Ari's hips, Cass pressed deeper with her tongue, applying pointed pressure inside.

Ari's fingers searched desperately for something to hold on to. Eventually, her hands landed on Cass's strong shoulders, clawing into them as she lost control of herself.

“Yes,” Cass grunted as she kept up her rhythm, enjoying the pain just as much as the pleasure.

In a matter of seconds, Ari’s body started to tense her muscles squeezing together and applying a suffocating pressure to Cass’s skull. But she wouldn’t stop, not now, not with Ari so close to her peak.

Instead, Cass pressed harder into Ari. Her tongue flicked against the walls of her entrance, taking in every drop of her.

Ari began to shudder, her deep moans turning into jilted whimpers as the pleasure took over. All at once, the pleasure washed over Ari as Cass moaned between her legs.

After a moment, Ari’s body slowed and released. “Fuck.”

Pulling away, Cass sighed and wiped the delicious elixir from her lips.

“Get on top of me, Cassandra.” Ari’s chest rose and fell rapidly, as she took command.

Jaw-dropping, Cass nodded and did as she was told. She stood from her place on the shag rug and looked down at Ari on the couch, still writhing from her orgasm. Pausing, Cass’s chest tightened as she met her girlfriend’s eyes.

The glow of the Christmas tree reflected off of her soft skin, casting a gentle light.

“God, you’re stunning.” Cass scoffed as she shook her head.

Ari blushed, shrugging. “Want a better view?”

A smirk took over Cass's face as she nodded. Before she was asked, Cass slipped off her boyshort boxers and let them fall to the ground. She could already feel how excited she was, the slick pleasure spreading to her upper thighs as she lifted her leg over Ari's lap, straddling her. She got herself into position, letting her wet center hover over Ari's.

Ari groaned as she got into place. "See, I like you like this. Wet, excited, obedient."



## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:31 pm*

Nodding, Cass bit her lip, lowered her mouth to Ari's ear, and whispered, "Tell me how you want me."

Taking control, Ari placed two hands on Cass's hips and guided them into a rhythm. When their centers aligned, Ari would thrust upward and press into Cass's throbbing clit. She didn't use a toy or her fingers, instead letting the force of their bodies pushing into each other send waves of pleasure through Cass.

"Fuck. It feels like you're already inside me." Cass whimpered as she bounced on Ari's center. Under the flannel, her breasts bounced with each grind of her hips.

"Good." Ari grumbled as she watched Cass closely, her eyes flicking between her girlfriend's delighted face and her immaculate body.

Feeling her thighs tremble, Cass pressed herself farther down. A part of her hoped that if she just kept lowering herself, Ari would finally give her what she wanted.

Laughing, Ari took one of her hands off Cassie's hips. "Is this what you want?" She plunged her hand between Cass's legs, letting her elegant fingers slip into her folds.

With a moan, Cass nodded. "Please, baby. I need you."

"Good girl." Ari licked her lips as she rubbed Cass's bead, feeling the hard clit between her fingers as she made wide circles.

It only took a few moments of pressure for Cass's excited body to tremble under Ari's touch. Her throat roared a scream, bouncing off the walls of Ari's chic

apartment.

Muscles tensing, Cass gripped the back of the couch as she lost control of herself. “Fuck!”

Ari laughed, a deep rumble from her chest as she watched the sight.

Cass released over Ari’s hands, her excitement dripping down. After a moment, her body relaxed and she sucked in a deep breath.

“God, you’re good.”

Licking her lips, Ari smiled. “I’m glad you think so, gorgeous.”

Cass nearly fell over onto the couch, sinking into the plush cushions. A part of her wished she could stay like this forever: Ari’s little housewife. But she knew that wasn’t realistic. After all, she wanted to make music work, even if it was going to take some time.

5

ROSE

There was almost a comfort in the steamy subway platform as the doors of the train car slid open and a rush of people shoved onto the tiled floor.

But as Rose and Drew pressed through the crowd at the Union Square station, Rose decided she might never leave the house again. The warmth of the underground tunnels was far better than the frigid December air above ground but the throng of clambering people would never be worth the effort.

Clutching her camera bag to her side, Rose made her way up the steps and through the turnstile at the top of the stairs.

Drew followed closely behind, weaving through the mass of people to stay just a few inches from Rose's back.

By the time they were breaking out of the sweaty mass of bodies, they were greeted by a rush of cool air at the exit. There, a rush of noise met their ears. Instead of the screeching subway cars, the bustle of traffic and pedestrians zipping through the sidewalks filled the air.

Drew pulled ahead. "This way." Reaching down to Rose's hand, Drew intertwined their fingers with hers. With a soft smile, Drew tried to bring Rose back down to earth.

After a moment, they broke through the crowd and into a more open area.

Pulling off to the side, just next to a small park where a few benches sat, Drew looked around Union Square. "You okay?"

"Yeah." Rose nodded as she tried to get her bearings, loosening the knit scarf around her neck to let the cold breeze meet her chest.

There was a reason that Rose avoided Manhattan's 14th Street this time of year... really every time of year. It was always too busy and full of tourists. But now especially, with the Union Square Holiday Market in full swing just across the street from where they stood, the entire place was crawling with moseying visitors.

Drew rubbed their hands together as the chill set into their fingers as they popped open the camera bag slung around their neck. "Okay, so the goal is to just capture some candid. There's no plan, so you're just going to have to see what happens."

“I’m not sure this is all that different from an engagement shoot.” Raising her eyebrows, Rose grew suspicious of Drew’s plan.

Scoffing, Drew wrapped an arm around Rose. “It’s not, but it’s about baby steps. There won’t be any staged moments here. So anything you capture will have to be wholly organic.”

## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:31 pm*

But looking over at the slow-moving market crowd, Rose's chest tightened. Suddenly the safety of a pre-planned proposal seemed a lot simpler than this. Maybe it's silly to try and expand out.

“Worst case, we've just gotten to walk around this beautiful market.” Drew winked as they guided both of us to the crosswalk whose light was just changing to green.

Sighing, Rose's shoulders dropped as she followed Drew's lead. It was a pretty night, and the market's twinkling lights seemed inviting.

By the time the pair were at the edge of the market, – a collection of plywood huts painted to look like a wintery village – the smell of hot chocolate and nutmeg filled Rose's nostrils. It smelled just a little like home.

After a moment, Rose gave in to Drew's idea and opened her own camera case whose weight was starting to wear on her neck.

With the digital camera in hand, Rose took in a deep breath and let Drew lead her inside.

The walkways were narrow, space heaters from each stall warming the space outside the shacks.

Smiling vendors waved down customers, displaying their wares for anyone to see. As Drew lifted their camera to their eye, aiming it at a young child who stretched out their arm toward a hand-woven ornament of a labrador puppy wrapped in Christmas lights, Rose saw exactly what they did.

It was exactly the kind of moment Rose needed to get better at spotting.

Drew's shutter clicked a couple of times before they lowered the device away from their face and smiled over at Rose. "What?"

"You're just very good is all." Rose shrugged, able to hide her blush with the chill of the evening air. Even after being together for a few months, Rose was still often amazed by Drew's talent.

When they first met, Drew hid their passion pretty well. Instead, they played it off like they were just an aloof ass with no interest in making friends.

But after a while, Rose broke through. It was inspiring, the way they worked so hard to do more than even photography. Rose had tried to make the same leap but was never able to follow through.

But this will be different.

Drew came back over to Rose and pulled her in close, flattening her puffer jacket as they pressed tighter.

Walking together, Rose kept getting distracted by the stalls. It was wildly impressive all of the items each person was able to make. There were food stands, hand-made clothes, specialty decorations, and so much more.

"What do you think so far?" Drew's low rumble of a voice cut through the light Christmas music playing over the speakers.

"It's shockingly beautiful. I'm surprised you like it, considering how crowded it is." Rose raised an eyebrow at them.

With a shrug, Drew laughed. “I confess, it’s not my usual scene. But it’s once a year, and look at how happy everyone is.”

Taking a scan of the crowd, Rose couldn’t pretend it wasn’t obvious. Everywhere she looked, happy people went about their night. Some of them held warm cups of cocoa as they browsed while others juggled bags of gifts for loved ones.

“True.” Rose bit her lip. Deciding to get a shot, Rose lifted the camera to her face and centered herself on the walkway. She created symmetry between each vendor, letting the path lead her eye down to the very end of the shops. Just as she clicked the shutter button, a seller winked at her. Amidst the chaos, he had noticed her.

Once Rose dropped the camera, the vendor had gone back to work.

In the time she’d taken the picture, she had somehow lost Drew. Looking around, Rose had no idea where they could’ve gone.

“Sorry, I just wanted a snack.” Drew laughed as they tapped Rose on the shoulder. When Rose turned around, Drew presented a cardboard platter of warm, Belgian waffles topped with strawberries drizzled in chocolate syrup and powdered sugar.

Rose’s mouth watered instantly. “Wow.”

Their cheeks lifted into a smile. “Did you think I wouldn’t reward you?”

Shaking her head, Rose giggled as she grabbed one of the waffles. “No, but this is definitely more than I expected.”

The two of them stepped off to the side of the market, each of them digging into their treat and watching as shoppers passed around them.

Rose used her plastic fork to cut off a square of the waffle, rubbing it around the chocolate drizzle before bringing it to her lips. The rich syrup smacked her taste buds just as the sweet strawberry followed it.

“Fuck.” Rose moaned as her eyes rolled back. As the food traveled down her throat, the warmth of the steaming waffle warmed her chest. She couldn’t be sure she’d ever tasted anything better.



## Page 10

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:31 pm*

Drew smirked at the nose, a familiar one. “Good.” As they ate, they kept their eye on Rose, having far too much fun watching her indulge.

But after a moment, Drew sighed. “I think you should bring your portfolio to the agency party.”

Rolling her eyes, Rose wiped her mouth with a napkin. “What? It’s a work event?”

Drew nodded. “I know. But the whole point is to recruit new talent. You’re unrepresented right now and if you want to make a serious leap, that’s a good step.”

“Drew, be serious.” Rose cut off another piece of waffle and shoved it into her mouth. Of course the thought had crossed her mind already. It would’ve been smart. After all, networking was the key to almost all of her past career success.

But something about carrying around a massive photography portfolio at a work event felt insane.

“I am being serious.” Drew scoffed. “It’s smart. Besides, Ari and Tommy would be impressed by your boldness.”

Unable to meet their eyes, Rose blushed. But this time, she wasn’t so sure she was hiding it as well.

Drew set their platter on the ledge just behind them. “Rose. You’re so talented, the world needs to see your work.” Bringing their finger to Rose’s chin, Drew lifted her gaze. “Will you do it for me?”

Rose swallowed hard. It was impossible to say no to a face like that. Biting her cheek, Rose nodded as she took her last bite. “Maybe.”

Pumping their fist, Drew smirked. “Thank you.” They wrapped their arms around Rose’s waist and pulled her closer.

Just as they got a few inches apart, a fleck of cold hit Rose’s nose. Looking up, she watched as a flurry of snow broke out over the Christmas market. A part of her felt like it was a sign. Or maybe, it was just the magic of being with Drew Hudson.

Meeting Drew’s gaze, Rose let her lips press against theirs. Even months later, the feeling of Drew’s mouth on hers was enough to send a wave of warmth through Rose’s entire body.

Shaking her head, Rose pulled away and smiled. “You’re one of a kind, Drew.”

“So are you.” Drew giggled as they pulled her in for another kiss.

If there was anyone on this earth who could make Rose believe in herself, it was not-so-grumpy Drew. Maybe they were right to believe in Rose so much. But there was only one way to find out.

6

TAYLOR

Okay, playing tennis in a sexy Santa costume is harder than I thought.

Taylor stretched her arm out to reach Mac’s serve, her shoulder rubbing against the cheap, suede and fluffy white trim. A grunt escaped her lips as her foot slammed into the hard court.

The ball cracked off of Taylor's racket and back across the net.

The crowd gasped as the ball flew back, moving far faster than any of them anticipated.

"Come on, Bennett," Taylor hollered across the court at her girlfriend with a wink.

Shaking her head, Mac smirked as she volleyed the ball back toward Taylor. As she took her swing, the cameras by the sidelines clicked as they captured the rising star's form.

Once the ball was sailing over the net, Mac laughed. "Are you tired yet, Young?"

The game was slower in pace than a Grand Slam, not wanting to make a charity game too competitive. After all, the audience was a mix of adults and children.

But as Taylor reached to hit the ball back, her racket slipped in her hand, sending the ball straight into the net.

The crowd clapped for Mackenzie. Wiping her hands on the red tennis skirt, with the matching white trim, Taylor smiled across the court at Mac. It was still odd to look back over the net and know that the whole world knew about their love.

It was why the crowd wasn't quite as thrilled, a part of them didn't know who to root for. Luckily, this was all for fun.

They kept up like that for a few rounds, catching themselves getting more and more competitive as the score tightened up. But even then, as the sweat dripped down Taylor's face, she was still able to smile through it.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:31 pm*

A part of her couldn't believe how light she felt on the court now, no longer dealing with her mother's looming presence off court. Even an event like this would have been a chance to intimidate the competition for Kim.

And Taylor couldn't be more grateful to rush across the court with a laugh as she faced off with her lover.

With the scores tied up in the third set, Mac chose a ball from the ball boy and got into serving position. As she did, her lips curled into a smile as she looked down the court at me. Even from here, Taylor could see the hunger in her eyes. She'd expected some of that lust to fade but so far, it was just as strong as the day they ran into each other in the locker rooms at Wimbledon.

Hell, it might be stronger now. Taylor swallowed hard as her eyes wandered down to Mac's muscular legs, bending as she prepared to leap off of the hard court.

With a loud crack, the ball slammed across the court. Shaking the dirty thoughts from her mind, Taylor hustled to reach the hurtling yellow felt. But she had been too distracted, by the time she made it to the right side of the court, the ball had bounced out of play.

The umpire, sitting in the towering chair and dressed as Santa, called it. "Match, Mackenzie Bennett."

Shrugging, Taylor giggled as she walked to the net and stretched out her hand to shake Mac's.

At the net, Mac pulled Taylor closer while shaking hands. With a whisper, Mac winked. “Good game, baby.” She planted a gentle kiss on Taylor’s cheek, sending a warmth from her skin straight down her spine.

Mac walked over to the umpire Santa and shook his hand too. Following close behind, Taylor did the same. “Thanks for volunteering, ump.”

“Anything for the children.” He gave a hardy laugh from under the fake beard and belly.

As Taylor and Mac walked to their bags and started putting their stuff away, Mackenzie walked over to the sidelines and started signing balls. For just a moment, Taylor watched her. Fame looked incredible on her. She was humble as ever and more generous than any other star Tay had seen.

Swallowing, Taylor walked over to the crowd and shrugged. “Do you guys even want this big ol’ loser’s signature?” She winked as she pulled out a sharpie and started working her way down the line of the excited kids.

Each of them squealed as they handed her their tennis balls.

After a moment, Taylor waved goodbye and grabbed her bag from the bench. Mac took her cue and slung hers over her shoulder.

They waved goodbye to the crowd before heading down the player’s tunnel toward the locker. Behind them, the crowd cheered one more time for them. Mac reached down with her free hand and grabbed Taylor’s, lacing their fingers together as they ducked into the tunnel.

Leaning against the wall, Mac’s coach Barbara stood up when she saw the duo. “Well done, you two. You raised some good money.”

Mac nodded and stopped in front of the locker room door. “I’m going to talk to Tommy about potentially matching the money raised. That sponsorship should cover it.”

“True, but you have to save some for yourself.” Babs shook her head as she looked over at Taylor. “She’s too willing to give money away.”

A smile took over Taylor’s face. “Or just the right amount.”

Babs rolled her eyes and gave each of them a pat on the shoulder. “You still looking for a new manager?”

“Yep.” Not wanting to get into the details, Taylor just smiled and turned toward Mac. “Ready to go home?”

With a nod, Mac said goodbye to Babs and pushed open the locker room door. Only once the door was closed did Mac turn around to look at Taylor. “She was just trying to be nice.”

Lowering her head, Taylor sighed. “I know, I just hate talking about it.”

“I hear you.” Mac squared her body with Tay’s, dropping her bag on the bench at the center of the locker room. “Maybe going to the agency party will help – just to give you a few options.”

“Maybe.” Taylor wiggled her eyebrows as she rested her hands on Mac’s waist. The red workout shirt made her muscles hard to ignore. Toned and bulging from the match, Mac’s arms looked like they could swallow Taylor whole.

Mac leaned down and kissed her cheek again. “You know, we could have a few of our own.”

Pulling away, Taylor gawked at Mac. “What? Kids?”

Mac nodded.

Taylor lightly punched her strong chest. “Mackenzie, you’re crazy. We’ve been dating for like five months.”

“And we’ve known each other for ten-odd years. I think it’s a great idea.” Licking her lips, Mac pulled Taylor closer.

## Page 12

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:31 pm*

A light moan escaped Taylor's lips as their bodies pressed together. "Of course you do. Because you think I'd take a season off. And that's where you'd be wrong."

Mac smirked back at Taylor, her eyes flicking between Taylor's lips and stunning gaze. "We could just give it a try and see what happens."

"Just give it a try? Like it's that simple?" Taylor laughed, trying to stop her throbbing clit from distracting her too much.

"I want you so badly, it might be just that simple." Not able to hold off, Mac brought Taylor even closer, pressing her lips into Tay's.

Moaning, Taylor melted into Mac's arms. With a kiss like that, it was hard to deny that Mac couldn't get her knocked up just by looking at her. Even if it was biologically impossible... maybe it was worth a try anyway.

Leaning into the kiss, Taylor let her tongue tease Mac's plump lips.

Pulling away, Mac smirked and walked toward the locker room door. She flicked the lock and sauntered back toward Taylor whose jaw dropped at the insinuation.

Once Mackenzie was within arm's reach, she wrapped Taylor in her arms and moved her toward the wall of wood lockers behind. She knew they'd made it when Mac let her body slam into the surface.

"Fuck." Taylor whimpered, the impact sending a pulse of excitement through her body. She couldn't pretend like it wasn't hot, like Mac's almost indifference to her



pain wasn't making her clit throb with anticipation.

Mac licked her lips as she let her hand work its way from Taylor's waist to her stomach, roughly tugging the red and white tennis skirt off away from her skin. Grunting as she moved the fabric, Mac let her head drop to Taylor's shoulders. There, she had a view of Taylor's entire figure.

Her cleavage peaked out of the top of her sports bra and the sexy Santa top.

"I didn't think this outfit would do it for me," Mac confessed as she plunged her hand down Taylor's skirt and past her sweat and pleasure-soaked panties.

As soon as Mac's fingers met Tay's pulsing center, a groan escaped her lips. Thank god they were alone here because she knew she wouldn't be able to stay silent.

Uninterested in wasting time, Mac used her free hand to grab Taylor's thighs, hoisting her off the ground.

Taylor followed her orders, jumping into Mac's arms and wrapping her sore legs around her.

"You're very good at following orders." Mac smirked.

Rolling her eyes, Taylor leaned into Mac's ear. "Only for you, and only like this."

With a laugh, Mac let her fingers slip lower into Taylor's folds. She applied a deep, knowing pressure on Taylor's clit, letting the hardened bead rub against her strong fingers. As soon as she felt Mac's touch, Taylor's body wanted to collapse into her girlfriend.

As her moans grew louder, Taylor rocked her hips against Mac's hand.

Mac was far too eager to wait much longer. Instead, she slid her hand down Tay's slit until she found her soaked entrance.

"Fuck." Mac's grip on Taylor's back tightened as she moaned.

Letting her head fall back, Taylor felt herself losing all control. Something about the way Mackenzie took her would never stop sending waves of pleasure through her.

But without lingering, Mac pressed two fingers deep inside Taylor.

"God." Taylor's eyes shot open, pleasure washing over her. Sweat was still dripping down her body from the match as she found herself bouncing on Mac's sturdy hand.

Eager for more, Taylor grinded against the hand. She let herself bounce along with Mac's thrusting, fingers pressing deeper and deeper inside. It was impossible to ignore just how soaked in pleasure Taylor was. Mac slid in and out of her effortlessly, her bulging biceps tensing with each push.

Letting her arms fall from Mac's neck to her arms, Taylor squeezed her veiny upper arm.

"Jesus, you're fucking hot." Taylor's head rolled back, slamming into the wood again; this time she hardly felt the impact, too distracted by the pulsing fingers and throbbing clit between her legs.

Mackenzie smiled, enjoying every second of pleasing Tay. "It's all for you, baby."

Something about the rumbled words made Taylor lose it, any pretense that she could hold out on reaching her climax flew out of the locker room. Instead, her body began to shudder. She couldn't keep up the bouncing anymore. Instead, she let Mac's fingers press deeper inside as they massaged her channel.

But Mac knew exactly what Taylor wanted. Using her grip on Taylor's back, which had dropped closer and closer to Tay's ass, Mac gently rocked her girlfriend's hips in time with her own hand.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:32 pm*

It was everything Taylor needed.

Her head fell forward, landing on Mackenzie's strong shoulders as a waft of their musky sweat filled her nostrils. It was overwhelming but in all the right ways.

Feeling her body beginning to tense, Taylor moaned as she sunk her teeth into Mac's shoulder, through the red workout shirt.

Mac grunted her pleasure at Taylor's bite, pain mixed into the sound as she kept up the pressure inside Taylor.

Watching Taylor's every movement, Mac's eyes flicked from her tightly shut eyes to her gaping mouth where stuttered breaths escaped her perfect lips.

Within seconds, Taylor's grip on Mac's arms tightened. Her short but manicured nails dug into the tensed flesh of Mac's biceps.

"Oh god, Mackenzie." Taylor gave a final scream of pleasure as her body released. Still for a moment, Taylor's body hunched as she released onto Mac's hand.

"Yes." Mac moaned as she held all of Taylor's weight in her hands

Limp, Taylor's head rested on Mac's shoulder as she tried to catch her breath. Mac slowed her thrusting before gently easing her fingers out of Taylor's center. Planting a kiss on Taylor's lips, Mac then brought her fingers to her own mouth and sucked Taylor's pleasure off of them.

Taylor watched her girlfriend's lips work each drop of her pussy into her mouth.

Swallowing hard, Taylor met Mac's gaze. "You need to take me home, right now. I need more of you."

With a laugh, Mac helped Taylor to the ground. "Consider it done."

7

ARI

"Not over there," Ari waved down her decorator as she walked through the space.

It was hard to imagine the massive, sterile-looking venue turning into the chic winter wonderland Ari had in mind for the party.

But the decorator had done a stellar job so far.

Looking around the private suite at the top of a midtown skyscraper, the bright, December sun shone through each window and into the space. Ari knew that the entire city skyline would be visible as soon as the sun set, twinkling in all its metropolitan magnificence.

That alone might be magical enough to get some new clients.

But when the elevator dinged behind her, Ari swung around to see who had come up.

"Surprise." Tommy grinned as she exited the metal box and stepped into the near-construction zone that would eventually become a holiday party setup.

Rolling her eyes Ari strode across the space to meet Tommy, who was dressed in an

elegant pantsuit with her hair in a bun. In her arms was a collection of decor boxes she had picked up on her way.

The visit wasn't much of a surprise considering Ari had basically begged Tommy to make the stop for her. Planning a Christmas party with two weeks' notice was a fool's errand.

Tommy shoved the boxes into Ari's arms. Putting her hands on her hips, Tommy wandered around the space, moving effortlessly around the decorators as they hung twinkling Christmas lights and puffy clouds overhead.

The clouds, made of fabric store stuffing, covered the twinkle lights and created a soft overcast glow over the space.

Ari watched on as the sound of Tommy's heels clacked against the polished concrete floors.

Tommy nodded. "Not too shabby. Is the agency covering any of this?"

Lifting her exhausted eyebrows, Ari shook her head. "Not a cent. But with any luck, I'll land enough clients to make it worth the money out of pocket."

Scoffing, Tommy shrugged. "You're a better woman than me. The group is on my last nerve right now."

Of course Ari was aware of Tommy's discontent. She was getting antsy for a new challenge but Ari wasn't sure that she could find it at SDO Management.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:32 pm*

Tommy walked over to the floor-to-ceiling windows that surrounded the venue and admired the view. “If nothing else, it’ll be one hell of a view.” She stared out like that for a moment before whipping around and snapping her fingers. “By the way, I have a lead.”

Those were exactly the words that Ari wanted to hear. She had put out a subtle call to the industry connections she trusted to see if anyone knew how to get Hazel Ford to New York for this party. Not wanting to alert the other agents to her plan, Ari had only been able to tell Tommy and a couple of the trusted assistants at SDO.

It was pretty easy to spot who was willing to go behind their assigned agents’ backs for a leg-up with one of the company’s lead agents. And Ari wasn’t afraid to call in favors.

Ari gasped and walked closer. “Are you serious?”

With a nod, Tommy continued, “Yeah. She’ll be in town for the holidays visiting friends. So now, you just need to figure out how to get her here.” Pointing down at the floor, Tommy admired the pristine floors.

With a parade of heels and dress shoes, they’d certainly be scuffed by the end of the party. But for now, they looked immaculate. And by the time the guests would be leaving, they’d all be too drunk to notice the mess they’d made.

Ari could hardly contain her excitement. This was a far more manageable problem to have. Convincing an esteemed, A-list actress to travel across the country for an agency party when she was already signed would have been nearly impossible. But

now, all Ari had to do was get her into this gorgeous skyscraper a little over a week before Christmas.

It might still take a Christmas miracle to make it happen, but Ari wasn't ready to give up.

“Oh, and one other thing,” Tommy interrupted Ari’s thought, “I'm pretty sure she and your girlfriend graduated the same year from the same college.”

Ari’s forehead wrinkled, unsure how that could be true. Surely Cass would have realized they’d gone to school together.

But the more she thought about it, the more likely it seemed. Cass had gone to a prestigious university and worked with a lot of up-and-coming stars who were also getting their degrees.

Have I even said what actress I’ve been eyeing?

Shaking herself out of it, Ari nodded. She already loved going home to Cass, but today she couldn't wait another second.

She grabbed Tommy's shoulders and pulled her in for a rushed tight hug. “You're the greatest agent at this goddamn place.” Ari released her grip and headed for the elevators, nearly breaking into a jog.

“You're fucking right about that.” Tommy hollered as she crossed her arms, watching her friend bolt across the venue.

As soon as the elevator doors opened, Ari stepped inside, leaving her team to do the work she trusted them to get done.



There was work to be done that only she could do. And she needed answers as soon as possible.

8

DREW

Drew wasn't sure their heart had ever raced so fast in their entire life. But as they shuffled over to the edge of the ice-skating rink, the plush padding of the landing squishing under their blades, Drew felt like they might be having a cardiac event.

"I promise it'll be fun." Rose giggled from behind them.

Whipping around, Drew rolled their eyes. "Do you understand how much I love you?" With her red locks and flushed cheeks, it was almost impossible to say no to Rose Miller. Drew had learned that just a couple of weeks after meeting the stunning woman.

Walking ahead of them, Rose smiled as she let her skates meet the ice. "I've got you." She held out her hands, ready to help them get on the ice.

Drew took in a deep breath and nodded, lifting their foot and setting it down gently on the slippery rink. As soon as they made contact with the ice, a teenager zoomed by and sent a gust of air through Drew's short hair.

"Jesus." Drew cowered as their feet started to slip on the ice.

Grabbing the sleeve of their bomber jacket, Rose giggled. "Easy."

Drew let themselves be steadied by Rose's hands, the gentle pull easing them onto the rink. One deep breath didn't feel like enough, so Drew tried to take another.

“There we go.” Rose smiled as she slowly moved alongside Drew. “It’s fun once you get the hang of it, I swear.”

Raising an eyebrow, Drew scoffed. “I don’t do well with things that stop me from walking. Any other sport and I’m game. But something on my feet... nope.”

Rose looped her arm through theirs, trying to provide some stability as they moved around the outside edge of the crowded rink. In the middle of Central Park, Wollman Rink was full of New Yorkers and tourists alike out for a nighttime skate.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:32 pm*

Drew tried to take it all in: the twinkling holiday lights that cast a warm glow on every face, the smell of hot chocolate carrying over the ice, and the gorgeous woman by her side. Sure, it wasn't the first activity Drew would have chosen but that's what made this relationship work. They had no choice but to come out of their comfort zone for Rose.

Following her motions, Drew's feet fell into sync with Rose's.

"See, now you're getting it!" Rose nodded as she watched them move.

Once they'd gotten to a decent speed, not a crawl but not a sprint, Drew decided to be bold and try two things at once: skate and talk. "I can't lie, I'm a little nervous about the party."

Rose whipped her head around, the motion almost kicking Drew off-balance. "Really?"

"Yeah." Drew nodded.

"Why?" Tilting her head, Rose tried to get them back up to speed. Around the couple, dozens of skaters zipped past them, including some kids who must have been doing this since they were born.

After a deep breath, Drew looked up at the skyscrapers surrounding the park. "It's a lot of famous people in one place. I've only ever shot one celebrity at a time. It sounds..."

“Overwhelming.” Rose shrugged. A familiar look washed over Rose’s face.

Of course, it was nerve-racking for Rose too, she’d have to hand her portfolio to an agent and actually set a new career path in motion. It was a terrifying prospect, one that Drew knew all too well.

“Exactly.”

After a second of skating, the sound of slicing ice filling both of their ears, Rose nodded. “But the good news is, you can just hide behind the camera and work. Talk if you want to or don’t. We’re there to work and networking is a bonus.”

She wasn’t wrong. Drew already had an agent and plenty of work lined up, in fact, a gallery had expressed some interest in showing a few of their pieces.

“That’s true.” Drew nodded before looking back at her. “How are you feeling about it?”

Sighing, Rose looked around the rink. “I know I’ll feel better after I do it but I hate the idea of having to give someone my work and just hope they like it.”

With a laugh, Drew smirked. “It is the worst feeling. But I promise they’ll love it.”

Rose met Drew’s gaze, squeezing their arm as she rested her head on their shoulder. “Thanks.”

They stayed like that for a moment, their skates moving in sync with each step. But after a moment, Rose pulled her arm away. “Do you think you’ll be alright on your own?”

There was no way to be certain but Drew wanted to play it cool. “Definitely.”

Raising an eyebrow, Rose watched them suspiciously for a second before caving and starting to move on her own. "I'll be back."

Without another word, Rose picked up her pace. Her skates slid across the ice with ease, pushing her faster and faster with each step. Before long, she was zooming past Drew. Her red hair flew behind her.

Drew swallowed hard. She looked amazing, majestic honestly. It was hard to imagine such an amazing woman ever lacking confidence, ever being afraid to hand anyone her portfolio.

But as snow started to fall over the crowded rink, Drew knew there was something they could do: make sure she felt like she could do anything. It might just be Drew's life mission from now on.

9

## MACKENZIE

Mackenzie didn't exactly recognize the address that Taylor had sent her earlier in the day but she did know that it was somewhere along Fifth Avenue, New York City's largest shopping district.

Lined with designer, flagship stores, Fifth Avenue was a glow for the holidays. LED snowflakes decorated the streetlamps. Each store had an elaborate display in their windows, scenes of winter wonderlands dappling the street.

Taylor had told Mac to bring a credit card and some comfortable shoes.

But as Mackenzie stood on the corner, waiting for Taylor, she still couldn't quite figure out where Taylor intended to take her. Looking around at the surrounding

stores, Mac wondered what they would be doing at Crate & Barrel or any number of the luxurious locations.

“You ready?” Taylor's familiar voice sounded from a few feet away.

## Page 16

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:32 pm*

Turning around, Mac couldn't stop herself from smiling when she saw Taylor's excited grin. "I would say yes but I have no idea what I'm supposed to be ready for."

Taylor let out an adorable giggle, her anticipation building. "Well, you're about to find out."

Reaching down, Taylor grabbed Mac's hand and interlaced their fingers. Looking at the stores across the street, Taylor waited for the pedestrian sign to switch to green. Once it did, she tugged Mackenzie along the crosswalk where Saks Fifth Avenue sat on the corner... actually, it took up the entire block.

An array of Christmas lights covered the concrete facade of the building, creating a snow-capped forest in the middle of Manhattan.

Mac raised an eyebrow, her suspicions growing with every second.

Waving her off, Taylor skipped forward and pushed open the pristine glass doors of the designer store.

The moment the duo stepped inside, a young woman dressed in chic trousers and a baggy button-up, approached with a gentle smile. "Miss Bennett, Miss Young. It's a pleasure to meet you, I'm Claire, your personal shopper for the day."

Mac could hardly process the words coming out of Claire's mouth as she looked around the adorably decorated shop. Christmas decor tastefully lined every wall of Saks making it feel like the perfect winter wonderland to shop in.

Gentle, jazzy Christmas music played over the speakers at just the right volume, not too loud to be distracting but loud enough to bring in some holiday cheer.

Taylor rubbed a delicate hand over Mac's back. "Mackenzie is still a little new to the whole personal shopper thing. But we're very happy to have you."

Finally getting a hold of herself, Mac's forehead wrinkles. "What exactly are we here for?"

Mac had already indulged in some luxury shopping after her U.S. Open victory. Taylor had been happy to come along then so she knew just how stuffed Mac's closet had become in the last few months. Plus it would be unromantic to shop for each other's Christmas gifts together.

The element of surprise was half the fun.

Taylor smirked. "You haven't gotten to enjoy one of my favorite facets of wealth just yet: buying everyone you know the nicest Christmas gift they've ever gotten."

Mac's jaw dropped as realization washed over her. She hadn't even considered how much fun it would be to spoil everyone in her life this time of year, even though she'd gotten a taste since her victory. Since August, she'd written Babs a massive check as a bonus for her years of minimal pay; Mac had bought her mother a brand new car, something reliable but sleek; and had treated her friends to dozens of fancy dinners and nights out on the town.

But the holidays were an even better excuse to take care of everyone around her.

With her assignment understood, Claire clapped her hands together and guided Mackenzie and Taylor inside the store. "This is so exciting!" Claire navigated the crowded store with ease, brushing past the other customers toward the home section



where she suspected most of Mac's desired presents might be.

As they walked, Mackenzie tried not to get too distracted by the shimmering lights and gorgeous decorations. Every few feet a towering Christmas tree glowed. Somehow, the magic of Christmas hadn't missed a single inch of the store.

By the time they reached the sitting area where Claire gestured for the couple to settle in, Mac felt full of holiday cheer and ready to shop to her heart's content.

Claire snapped her fingers together and a shiny, silver cart full of incredible gifts was wheeled inside the closed-off area. Taylor leaned back on the couch, letting her arm rest on the back cushion. A satisfied smile took over her face.

Mac wasn't sure if she'd ever be able to get her jaw off the floor. "How do they know exactly what everyone in my life would want?" she asked as she looked at a cart labeled for her mom. It contained a gorgeous set of kitchen knives, handy cooking gadgets, deluxe mugs that kept themselves warm, and dozens of things Mac couldn't even name.

Taylor bit her lip. "I sent them a dossier for each of your friends and family, and then they did their own research."

Somehow these strangers had put more effort into Mac's Christmas than she'd ever put in herself. But she couldn't lie, it felt like a complete weight off her shoulders to know that she could select any item on the carts and never worry about hitting that credit card limit ever again.

Taylor watched on with glee as Mac hand-selected every item that would be immaculately wrapped and delivered for her most treasured loved ones.

During a brief intermission, two steaming lattes were delivered to the couple in their

sitting area.

Mac took a sip of the piping hot coffee, the foam lingering on her upper lip as she tasted the rich flavor.

Taylor clicked her tongue. “So I have one more surprise for you.”

Shaking her head, Mac was thrown back into disbelief. There was no way that this incredible woman would have thought of anything else.

“Taylor Young, you're going to give me a heart attack.”

With a nonchalant shrug, Taylor smiled. “Claire, bring it in.”

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:32 pm*

And just like that, the wheels of a garment rack clattered into the room. On the long, sterling silver bar, hangers full of elegant dress wear, mostly pantsuits with a few masculine dresses interspersed between, swayed.

Mac stood from her seat on the couch immediately, setting the delicious latte down on the side table. Before she could manage to get any other words out, Mac started to thumb through each hanger and evaluate the options presented to her.

It was almost startling how well Taylor knew her, able to pick out the exact items Mac would have chosen for herself. She'd assumed after over a decade of not speaking that some of her knowledge would have faded. But that didn't seem to ring true.

Mackenzie's eye caught on one piece in particular: an emerald green suit with a black button-down. Sleek and timeless, the piece was perfect for the occasion. It wasn't too flashy but felt on-theme and well-considered.

She grabbed the piece off of the hanger and started to put it on. From the couch, Taylor watched her every movement.

But once she was half naked, standing in her boxers and a sports bra, Mac sighed. "You know, we really should be shopping for you. The party is far more important for you than for me."

Rolling her eyes, Taylor shook her head. "Oh please, I have dozens of once-worn dresses perfect for this occasion. What I really need to figure out is what kind of agent I even need."

“Maybe one that’s like... not a homophobe and ideally isn’t related to you by blood or marriage.” Mac winked as she slipped on the green trousers.

“Good point.” Taylor shrugged as she leaned forward, watching Mac’s every move.

Once the suit was one, each button done up except the top, Claire came back into the room with a tailor. “Shall we take some measurements?”

Before Mac could answer, Taylor nodded. “We need a perfect fit. And we’ll need it done by tomorrow. Is that possible?”

“For the two best tennis players in the country? Of course we can.” Claire beamed.

As the tailor approached, Mac straightened the collar of the emerald jacket. “Technically speaking, I’m the best in the country.” She winked over to Taylor with a smug grin.

It felt good to be in this room, to look in the mirror and see such a nice suit. After all these years, the work had paid off and Mac couldn’t have been more grateful.

And to repay Taylor for all of her help since August, Mac needed to find her the perfect agent. Tomorrow might just be the night.

10

CASS

It wasn’t until the morning of the party that Ari and Cass finally saw each other again. When Cass had received Ari’s frantic text, she was staying over with Gabby in Queens.

They had talked on the phone briefly but Cass had been left with the task: figure out how to get in touch with Hazel Ford.

But now, Cass sat in Ari's apartment and poured over the guest list while she waited for her girlfriend to arrive home. It was an impressive list, star-studded from top to bottom. A part of Cass was nervous, even though she'd worked with plenty of celebrities when she was a sound mixer.

Before she could get too in her head, she heard the jingling of Ari's keys in the door.

As soon as the door swung open, Ari laughed. "How did neither of us know you knew Hazel Ford?"

Shrugging, Cass stood from the bar stool she had been sitting in. "I have no idea. I just thought it was a common name. I had no idea she was such a star now."

"Did she confirm?" Ari was eager, tapping her fingers along the counter as she walked closer. Once she was standing next to Cass, she placed a gentle kiss on her lips. "It's good to see you, I missed you last night."

Cass wiggled her eyebrows. "Good." Raising her finger, Cass continued, "She's supposed to call me back any second now."

Ari pumped her fist. "God, that's amazing. If I can get her to the party, we're golden."

As if she could hear them talking about her, Hazel Ford's name appeared on Cass's lock screen. Looking at Ari, Cass grew stern. "Be chill, she's my old college buddy. I'm going to work it."

With a nod, Ari planted her palms on the cold countertop.

Cass swiped on the call. “Hey, girl. I can’t believe it’s been so long!”

“Hi! I really missed you! How have you been?” Hazel’s familiar voice rang through the line, sending a warmth to Cass’s chest.

## Page 18

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:32 pm*

The two of them had been a part of a larger group in college, spending countless nights flashing fake IDs to knowing bartenders. But work, grad school, and life had made it increasingly difficult for them to stay in touch. Especially once Hazel moved out West.

Ignoring Ari's eager smile, Cass nodded. "I'm honestly doing so well. I worked in sound for a bit but really missed music, so I quit and I'm giving that a shot."

"That's so amazing. Honestly, I think I need some of that energy myself." Hazel sighed, the sound of a New York hotel buzzing in the background.

"Really?" Cass lifted her eyebrows.

Hazel continued, "Yeah, honestly this party you mentioned sounded like exactly what I was looking for. I just don't feel like my reps in L.A. get me. I want something grittier and I felt that back in college, ya know?"

Clenching her fists as she tried to contain her excitement, Cass bit her lip. "I really do. Well look, I don't want to pretend like I don't have a motive. My girlfriend is Ari Graves, she's really high up at SDO Management and is known for revamping careers. She might be a great fit."

There was a heavy silence, the sounds of an elevator ding taking up the phone waves.

"Okay, I'll stop by. But no promises." Hazel giggled. "And you have to promise to have a drink with me while I'm there."

“Done and done, cutie. See you tonight, I’ll text the details.”

After they said their goodbyes, Cass hung up the phone. She held up her finger for silence until she was certain the call had ended. But once it was, she leaped into the air with excitement.

“I can’t believe it!” Ari squealed. “My baby did it!”

Wrapping her arms around Ari, Cass laughed.

Ari pulled away just long enough to press her lips into Cass’s. “You are incredible.”

Playing it cool, Cass shrugged. “No biggie, just got an A-lister to your work thing.”

“I think it’s a huge deal.” Ari bit her lip as she smiled. “Now we just have to make sure we make it there ourselves.”

They forced themselves apart, each of them walking into Ari’s bedroom where two garment bags hung from the closet door. The glam for a party like this was no joke, it was going to take a few hours and they had to be early.

But Cass couldn’t help but smirk. With her help, Ari had pulled off quite the feat and this was the final countdown. In just a few hours, they would know whether Ari had landed Hazel Ford as a client.

11

TAYLOR

Taylor's apartment had become a complete mess after just a couple of hours of getting ready for the agency party. Of course, most of it was Taylor’s clutter.



Before she could put on her dress, Taylor had to finish all of her makeup and her hair. She had set herself up in her marble-tiled apartment, trying not to get distracted by the gorgeous woman in the other room.

Across the apartment, Mac quickly threw on her suit and combed her hair. Now, she stood anxiously in Taylor's massive living room, whose windows overlooked Central Park as she waited for Taylor to finish getting ready.

With her hair in delicate curls and the subtle face of makeup completed, Taylor walked from the bathroom to the living room. Over the old record player, Mackenzie had insisted on playing Frank Sinatra's Christmas album.

Before she even crossed the room, Taylor knew what Mac would say as soon as she turned around – considering she was only wearing a sleek black bra and a high-waisted, black G string.

Sure enough, when Mackenzie heard the soft padding of Taylor's feet on the polished hardwood floors, she whipped around. "Holy shit."

"How does my makeup look?" Taylor rolled her eyes and she tried to redirect her girlfriend to the topic at hand.

Mac scoffed as she tried to tear her eyes away from Taylor's toned, muscular body. "What a silly question to ask when you walk in here looking like this. Maybe we don't have to go to the party after all." Licking her lips, Mac's mind was immediately in the gutter.

Snapping her fingers, Taylor sighed. "I'm being serious, we don't have all day."

Mac walked closer and placed her hands on Taylor's hips, the feeling of her calloused hands on Taylor's soft skin sending a wave of excitement through her body.

More serious now, Mac examined Taylor's makeup and hair. “I think it's perfect, subtle but really brings out your eyes. And your hair looks luscious as always.”

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:32 pm*

Trying not to let her cheeks flush from the compliment, Taylor patted Mac's shoulder. She could feel the sturdy muscle even under the layers of suit fabric. "Thank you." A part of her wanted to cave and abandon the party entirely to enjoy a night in with her hunky girlfriend.

But from the dining room table, Taylor could hear her phone buzzing. She had no idea who would be calling at this time of night on a weekend so close to Christmas.

When she strode across the room and read the name on her phone screen, panic set in. "Fuck. It's Kim, what am I supposed to say?"

Mac offered a gentle shrug. "The truth?" Historically, Mackenzie was a horrible liar, the truth flowed out of her like water through a sieve.

Taylor laughed as she picked up the hunk of metal from the long table. "That's gone so well in the past." With a link to Mac, Taylor brought the phone to her ear and accepted the call. "Hey, mom." Taylor tried to sound stern.

Through the phone, Kim sighed. "Hello, daughter. I was just calling to check on you and make sure you're still coming for Christmas."

Nodding, Taylor turned toward her windows and looked out at the city skyline and central park stretching out before her. "Yep, we'll be there." Of course, Kim hadn't quite accepted that Mac would be in attendance too, but she'd get there eventually.

Besides, Mac wasn't one to back down from an uninterested in-law.

Clearing her throat, Kim grew nervous. “How is the search for a new agent coming?”

It was almost a surprise that Kim would be so bold. But Taylor knew she wasn't typically one to shy away from a difficult conversation.

Looking over at Mac, Taylor knew that as naïve as Mackenzie was, Kim deserved the truth. “Actually, Mac is taking me to her agency's holiday party. There is an agent there that I've been interested in for a couple months.”

There was a long silence on the other end of the phone. If Taylor wasn't wrong, Kim was standing by the beach. A cold wind must've been hitting her face off of the Long Island coast.

Eventually, Kim relented. “Don't forget your worth. We'll talk later.”

The line went dead and Taylor wasn't entirely sure what to think. It was a step in the right direction, at least she had accepted the reality of her mistakes.

Mackenzie walked up behind Taylor and wrapped her arms around Tay's waist. Resting her chin on Taylor's shoulder, Mac planted a delicate kiss on the exposed skin. "You okay?"

Taking a deep breath, Taylor nodded. “I guess it's the best I could've hoped for.”

Her eyes were drawn to the glowing Christmas tree at the corner where the entirely glass walls met. Its warmth and comfort had become a staple in the apartment, turning a bachelorette pad into a home. In all honesty? Taylor wasn't so sure she ever wanted to take it down. It would always be the first tree she and Mac decorated together.

But looking past the tree, a flurry of snowflakes started to fall on the balcony just

outside the apartment.

“I guess we should get going, just in case the snow gets bad.” Taylor bit her lip.

With a nod, Mackenzie released her grip and walked Taylor back to the bedroom where her silver, sparkling gown hung on a hook near the bed.

Mac giggled. “This might be an essential part of leaving.”

Taylor groaned as she started to slip on the dress. Once it was on, she knew there was no going back and she would actually have to go to the dreaded party.

Suddenly all of her fears came rushing back.

What if no one signs me?

Am I damaged goods?

Is this the end of my career?

But as her mind spiraled out, Mac delicately laid the fabric over Taylor's head and helped drape it down her body. Once the gown was zipped into place, Mac's strong hand cupped Taylor's shoulders and reminded her why she had made the choice.

No amount of sponsorships or time on the court would ever be worth giving this up.

Besides, maybe she'd be able to sign with a queer agent who would understand what she'd been through. It might end up being the perfect solution.

Slipping her feet into her 5-inch, black, red-bottom heels, Taylor took a deep breath and smiled at Mackenzie. “Let's get after it.”

12

CASS

Cass wasn't sure she'd ever been this nervous. As the elevator ascended the skyscraper, toward the elegant party awaiting them, Cass squeezed Ari's arm in hers.

Luckily, it wouldn't be super crowded when they arrived. Ari would be putting the finishing touches on the event, making sure the food and drinks were flowing on the caterer trays and the DJ had a setlist.

But a part of Cass feared that Hazel would fall through and the entire night would be a bust.

"You look amazing." Ari smiled as she looked Cass up and down. On the way in, Ari had carried an umbrella to make sure the falling snow didn't make either of their hair frizz up.

Smoothing the short, bleached hairs on the top of her head, Cass blushed. "Really?" It was an older dress, a red gown with a high slit over her left leg. Cass had feared it was too scandalous of a choice, her cleavage and figure on full display for a professional event. But Ari had insisted it was a great look.

Ari nodded, wrapping her arm around Cass's waist. "Yes, really. I'm a very lucky woman."

Before the temperature in the elevator could rise any further, a ding sounded from the

doors.

“You’re going to do great.” All Cass wanted to do was kiss her, but she didn’t want to stain Ari’s cheeks with her red lipstick.

Taking in a deep breath, Ari grinned as the door swung open.

The massive room was already abuzz. Caterers hustled across the floors, straightening their ties and aprons; the DJ set up her stand and speakers; the decorator was tidying the table settings at the high tops.

As soon as the couple exited the elevator, the world felt like it slowed. Even though no guests had arrived yet, thankfully, everyone in the room turned to look at the glamorous pairing entering the space.

Ari waved her hand, dismissing them back to work. But the corners of her lips lifted with pleasure. Cass could tell that she loved the attention they drew together. As they strutted across the venue, the DJ’s speakers started to play an exciting Christmas song. A twist on “Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas”, the song was upbeat and just the start of the lineup for the night.

At the center of the room, Cass stopped in her tracks and looked around at the work her girlfriend had done. “Wow, this is amazing. Especially given the time crunch.”

Sure enough, it would have been hard for any guest to picture the cold, sterile suite that Ari had walked into less than two weeks earlier. Now, it was a magical snowy paradise fit for any level of celebrity who may walk in.

“Thank you. All I ever want is to impress you.” Ari confessed, letting her hand drop from Cass’s waist and landing in her palm. She intertwined their fingers, holding them like that for a moment.

Biting her lip, Ari wrinkled her nose. “Do you think she’ll show?”

Cass nodded, not wanting to show any doubt. “She won’t want to burn me like that. She’ll be here. Besides, you’re too intriguing to miss out on.”

Before Ari could roll her eyes, a caterer zipped past with a mismatched tray of hors d'oeuvres. “Hold up, champ. Who sent you out with that platter?”

Just like that, Ari was off to work and Cass found her spot at a nearby table. She was ready to entertain, to keep the company of Ari’s various current and future clients. And with any luck, Hazel would arrive and put both of their nerves at ease. But as the elevator signaled its descent back down to the lobby, Cass’s heart started to race.

It was too early for more guests. But as she peeked out the window, she wondered if the coming snowstorm would encourage guests to be timely. The sun had already set and the chill of a December night was taking hold.

Cass watched as the elevator slowly ticked up each floor.

Who could be this early?

13

DREW

With a startling ding, the elevator ground to a halt, and the doors swung open.

All of Drew’s nerves melted away when they were greeted by a mostly empty space.

“Thank god,” Drew muttered as they ran their hand through their slicked-back hair, a few snowflakes speckling the brown locks.



Giggling, Rose nodded. “I had the same thought.”

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:32 pm*

The couple stepped out of the elevator and into the suite. Past the elevator, the entire skyline opened up in front of them. It felt like floating in a cloud and despite the falling snow outside, the skyline was clear as day from up here.

“Wow.” Rose gawked as she looked around the space, Christmas music playing from the DJ stand.

Striding across the room, Cass laughed. “Right? Ari did amazing work.”

“No kidding.” Drew teased as they shook Cass’s hand.

“Don’t be silly, we’re friends.” Pulling them into a hug, Cass squeezed Drew before going in to hug Rose too. “Happyholidays, you two. And thank you for being willing to come tonight.”

In unison, Drew and Rose nodded. “Of course.”

Clapping her hands together, Cass looked them up and down. “You clean up nice.”

Drew looked down at their simple outfit, a well-fitting pair of black trousers, black Chelsea boots, and a clean, white button-down. Around their neck, a camera bag dangled.

Now, there was no question about how good Rose looked. She’d opted for a black pantsuit, hugging all of her curves just right. Drew had hardly been able to keep their hands to themselves on the way over to the party.

Rose shook her head, tucking a red hair behind her ear as she adjusted the messenger bag on her shoulder. “Thank you, so do you. That red is magnificent.”

Waving off the compliment, Cass shrugged. “Make yourselves comfortable. If you need anything, don’t be shy. The guests should start arriving soon.”

They’d arrived with just enough time to set up some lights around the elevator’s entrance. From the doors, a white carpet led the guests to the main party area, creating a faux press area for new arrivals. This was where most of Drew and Rose’s work would be done.

Once Cass was out of earshot, Rose let out a heavy sigh. “God, I’m so nervous. When am I supposed to hand this portfolio over while we’re working?”

Drew smiled, squaring themselves with Rose. “I promise there will come a point in the night where there aren’t really guests arriving. At that point, you can hand it to your target agent and I’ll cover anyone who might come in. Okay?”

All Drew could hope was that the plan was reassuring, that it gave Rose some security. But it would be a big night, no matter what.

Once she nodded, Rose started to pull her camera out of her bag. Drew followed her lead, attaching their flash to the camera shoe at the top of the body. It clicked into place just as the elevator started heading back downstairs.

“Okay, just about show time. Most of these people will be agents getting here a little early.” Rose tried to shake her nerves by reminding herself of all the details she already knew.

Before they knew it, the doors were sliding open again. This time, a few agents stepped out.

Once the guests walked toward them, Rose and Drew released a flurry of photos. The lighting was great, the fluffy clouds diffusing a perfect soft glow over the guests as they entered.

After the first few agents, Tommy pressed down the walkway. She paused just long enough for the duo to take some good pictures. “Just getting my money’s worth since I represent so many broke artists.” She winked before stretching out her hand to shake Drew’s hand.

“Good to see you, Tommy.” With a sturdy shake, Drew laughed.

Turning to Rose, Tommy leaned in for a hug. “Pleasure as always, Rose. I hear you’re carrying a hefty portfolio tonight. If you need an intro, say the word.”

Rose hid her blush. “Thanks so much, Tommy.”

As soon as Tommy left, Drew watched the nerves flood back to Rose’s face. But before they could do anything to comfort her, the elevator was moving again and they had no choice but to prepare for another gaggle of guests.

No matter what happened, Rose would be good. She was an undeniable talent and any agent could see that.

And Drew would do anything they could to make it happen.

14

MACKENZIE

By the time Mac and Taylor had gotten out of the house and into a car, the snow was really coming down.

Mackenzie looked out the window the whole ride, only looking away to sneak peeks at Taylor. The city looked magical as the snow started to blanket the decor along the streets. Even a week before Christmas, the sidewalk tree shops were bustling with customers.

## Page 22

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:32 pm*

Mac's hand dropped to her pocket, checking to make sure her wallet and her gift for Taylor were still in her pocket.

"Alright, ladies. Here we are." The driver pulled the car to a halt directly in front of the building they'd been told to come to.

From the outside, it looked incredibly unremarkable.

Once the car was in park, the driver hopped out and jogged around to Mac's side of the car. He pulled the door open and nodded to her as she stepped out.

Turning around, Mac offered her hand to Taylor as she ducked out of the black Cadillac.

"Thanks." Taylor smiled up at Mac, growing a nervous lump in Mac's throat.

Arm in arm, the couple walked to the doors of the massive building, stepping around the pedestrians going about their weekend. A few of them looked over their shoulders, curious where this red-carpet-ready duo was headed.

Mac winked at one of the women who seemed to recognize them. A part of her still felt strange being able to hold Taylor like this, letting the entire world know they were together. But god, it was freeing.

The doorman pushed open the door, making sure no one had to lift a finger. She directed the couple to the elevator bank that led directly to the top floor.

Once inside, they clicked the penthouse button and waited as the metal box shot up the building. If Mac hadn't spent so much time in Taylor's place she would have gotten dizzy from the speed with which the elevator moved.

Before they knew it, they were slowing as they approached their floor.

"Ready?" Mac turned to Taylor, prepared for cameras and a loud party.

Swallowing hard, Taylor nodded. "Don't let go of my hand."

It was impossible to stop herself from smiling as Mac reached down and interlaced their fingers. She was beaming as the doors swung open, immediately blinded by the flashes of two cameras near the entrance.

Stepping forward, Mac and Taylor tried to get their bearings as they posed along the white carpet. Mackenzie could hear the party beyond the flash, a DJ blasting Christmas remixes, agents chatting, and caterers shuffling.

Hand in hand, they worked the angles for the photographers. Blinking through the flashes, Mac recognized one of them and raised her voice over the noise. "Hey, Drew! Good to see you!"

Drew lowered their camera and reached out their hand. "You too, congrats on the big win."

From beside them, the other photographer, a gorgeous redhead, waved. "Hi, I'm a big fan."

"This is my girlfriend and colleague, Rose." Drew gestured.

Mac and Taylor stretched out their hands and took turns shaking the photographer's

hand. Around her neck, a messenger bag with a manilla envelope stuck out.

Smiling at the two stars, Drew nodded. “Enjoy the party, it’s gotten pretty lively.”

“So it seems.” Taylor giggled, squeezing Mac’s hand harder as they kept moving.

Tightening her grip, Mac reassured Taylor that she wasn’t going anywhere as they made their way into the crowd. As soon as they were past the photographers, party guests started to greet them and introduce themselves.

Most of them were agents, eyeing Taylor as a potential new client while the guests were other celebrities saying hello.

Taylor dropped Mac’s hand, her confidence growing with each step, as she shook hands and greeted friendly faces.

As they strolled through, Mackenzie started to recognize a few of them from the members-only club they went to. They’d revisited the venue a few times since the end of the tennis season, even making a couple friends.

But this was different, no longer in hiding. Every single person there knew exactly who they were and that they were together. Mackenzie was sure there would be a few tabloid pictures of them the next day.

Finding an empty high-top, Taylor and Mac sidled up to it just as a caterer in a messy tie walked closer. “Good evening, ladies. Can I offer you some champagne?”

Mac nodded as she reached into the tray and grabbed two flutes. “Thanks, chief. What’s your name?”

Raising an eyebrow, Taylor watched on as Mac handed her a glass.



*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:32 pm*

The caterer cleared her throat. “Cy.” Immediately, her face flushed. Even to a complete stranger like Mac, it was obvious that Cy had been in trouble at events like this before.

Laughing, Mac lightly slapped her shoulder. “Your tie is loose, I won’t tell.”

Her eyes zipped down. “Shit. Thank you. I was running out of my house, my roommate was crying about her shitty girlfriend. My boss would’ve killed me.”

“No worries. If they say anything to you, let me know and I’ll talk to them. Okay?” Mac nodded. She’d worked jobs like this for years, and six months out from her life-altering win she wasn’t anywhere near forgetting what it was like.

“Seriously?” Cy gawked. “By the way, I’m such a huge fan of both of you.”

Wiggling her eyebrows, Taylor smiled at the sweet caterer before dismissing them back to work. “You’re sweet.” She turned back to Mackenzie who was quietly sipping some champagne.

With a shrug, Mac swallowed the bubbly drink. “Just looking out for the working man.”

Taylor rolled her eyes as her gaze wandered over the party.

“Just go talk to Ari, she’ll be so interested to represent you.” Mac gently rubbed Taylor’s exposed shoulders. Her dress looked amazing, shimmering under the decorative clouds overhead.

Lifting her glass to her lips, Taylor took a massive drink. “I’m going to need two more of these before I have that kind of courage.”

Mac laughed and held her close. With any luck, she’d catch Tommy somewhere around here and be able to get an easy introduction for Taylor. But if she didn’t, the two of them might just have to be bold enough to hunt Ari down themselves.

15

ARI

Despite the raging party, Ari couldn’t take her eyes off of the elevator doors. Hazel Ford had yet to arrive and as the night grew later, Ari was beginning to fear she might not show.

Taking a deep breath, she tried to remind herself that even if Hazel didn’t come, the night had been a smashing success. Ari’s current clients felt special and she’d gotten a few new interested clients.

Besides, she could see Taylor Young cowering in the corner, too nervous to approach any of the new agents.

From what Ari had gathered, Taylor was pretty lucky to never have to handle these negotiations herself. Kimberly Parker, a former pro herself, had managed Taylor’s career from daycare.

Ari leaned into Cass’s ear. “I might go chat with Taylor Young while we wait for Hazel.”

But just as Ari turned, the elevator dinged again with a late arrival. As soon as the doors opened, the cameras flashed.

The star walking in, a tall, slender brunette, covered her face with her hands.

“That’s our girl.” Cass nodded, following Ari over to the newcomer. Tapping Rose on the shoulder, Cass smiled. “Do me a favor, don’t let these pictures see the light of day.”

Leaning over to the photographers, Ari smiled. “This is a private meeting, so just delete what you got. I appreciate it.”

Drew and Rose nodded, dismissing themselves from the scene.

Turning her attention to Hazel, Cass hugged her. “Thank you so much for coming. It’s so good to see you.”

Hazel nodded. “Of course, anything for Cassie Owens. You saved my ass in class a dozen times.”

“Oh god, that was nothing.” Cass shook her head before putting her arm around Ari. “Hazel, there’s someone I want you to meet. This is my girlfriend, Ari Graves. I mentioned her on the phone.”

With a knowing but nervous smile, Hazel shook Ari’s hand. “The lead agent at SDO Management.”

Ari waved off the compliment. “Welcome back to New York. Lead agent is generous. But it’s a pleasure to meet you, Cass has nothing but good things to say.”

A caterer appeared with a tray of drinks as if on command. Reaching for the tray, Ari passed a glass of champagne to Hazel.

“A little early for champagne, no?” Hazel raised a suspicious eyebrow.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:32 pm*

As Ari guided Hazel through the crowd and toward a table at the back where they'd have some cover from the other guests, she shrugged. "You tell me."

The three of them gathered around the table as Ari cleared her throat. "I don't want to take up too much of your time, I know you're busy and I know you've gotten a dozen of these."

Hazel smirked.

"But I'd be ashamed if I didn't give it a shot. Rumor is you're looking for a change. A big one. And I think I can help."

"Is that right?" Hazel narrowed her gaze. It was obvious that she'd already done her own research, prepared for this very meeting.

Nodding, Ari leaned closer. "You want an image shift and your current management isn't game. But I am. My entire career is about helping artists find their path, no matter what that is. I have the connections in this city to get you the gritty roles you're looking for and I won't rest until you've gotten the scripts you want."

It was a good sell, one that Hazel was struggling to argue with. "My contract with my current agent isn't finished for another two years."

"SDO's legal team is the best in the country. We'll have you out of that in two hours with no damages. That's a promise." Ari clenched her jaw, her game face on.

From the corner of her eye, she watched Cass's face as she looked from Hazel to Ari,

trying to gauge the conversation.

Letting out a deep breath, Hazel looked at Cass. “Tell me honestly: you trust this?” Of course, Hazel knew it was a biased opinion, but she needed someone to vouch for what Ari was offering.

Cass nodded, placing her hand on Ari’s forearm. “More than anything. All she talks about is her clients. She falls asleep thinking about your career and wakes up with a plan and contingencies. If I’m wrong, you can roast me in the alumni chat all you want.”

Licking her teeth, Hazel brought her champagne to her lips. After she took a drink, she shifted the faux-fur coat draped over her shoulders. “We’ll be in touch.”

She took a look out of the floor-to-ceiling windows. “I forgot how gorgeous this city is in the snow.”

Walking her to the elevator, Ari nodded. “New York is always here for you. And so are we.”

After they shook hands, Hazel got back into the elevator and disappeared from the party. As soon as the doors closed, Ari pumped her fists. It was quick and easy. The odds of success were high. All Hazel was someone to give her permission to act selfishly and Ari was more than happy to oblige.

But there was still work to be done.

Turning to Cass, Ari kissed her cheek. “I need to go snag Taylor Young.”

“Get to it, baby.” Cass winked as she watched Ari disappear into the crowd.

Ari pressed through the bustling party, a small dance floor having broken out at the center. At a hidden away table, Taylor Young snacked on a stuffed mushroom. When she saw Ari approaching, she wiped the corners of her mouth and smiled.

“Taylor Young, I’ve been looking for you.” Ari smirked as she stuck out her hand. “You had a great season and I think we’ve got many more coming.”

Raising her eyebrow, Taylor laughed. “We?”

It was the only in that Ari needed as she rested on the high-top table. And now it was time to close the deal.

16

ROSE

After Hazel Fordleft the penthouse party, the elevator activity dropped significantly.

Biting the inside of her cheek, Rose peeked over at the agent she’d had her eye on for the entire night. He was a well-known representative for artists and would probably be able to connect Rose with some galleries.

But the thought of talking to him made Rose’s stomach flip.

“You can do it,” Drew whispered as they leaned closer, slowly packing up their camera bag. The odds of needing to take more pictures were pretty low, at this point most people were pretty drunk and just enjoying the festivities.

Rose tapped her foot against the polished concrete floors. “Are you sure? Will you be okay over here?”

Drew laughed as they looked around. “Yeah, I think I can handle it. Just twenty seconds of courage.”

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:32 pm*

“Twenty seconds.” Letting out a sigh, Rose pulled the portfolio from her bag and took a bold step forward.

Just as she was crossing the party, one of the other agents speaking with John Moore walked away, leaving an empty space for Rose to slot in.

She put on a smile as she took the spot, holding out her hand to the agent. “Mr. Moore, right?”

John raised his eyebrows and nodded, shaking her hand. “That’s right. And who might you be?” His eyes darted down to the camera around her neck.

“My name’s Rose Miller, I’ve been photographing the event. But I just wanted to say hello. I’m a huge fan of your entire client list.” Rose tried to keep her breathing steady, not wanting to rush any of her words.

“Really? That’s nice of you to say.” Narrowing his eyes, John could tell a pitch was incoming. “If you like my list, you’d probably fit into it well.”

Smirking, Rose shrugged. “Funny you should say that. I happened to bring my portfolio.” She set the folder on the table between them.

Before he responded, John reached out and grabbed it, flipping through the images briefly. “God, it’s dark in here. But even so, this is great work. How are you trained?”

“Self-taught.” Rose swallowed hard, suddenly aware of how fresh she was.



John nodded. "I miss when everyone was self-taught. The work is so much more unique, much less uniform when you've learned how the camera works for you."

Trying not to grin too eagerly, Rose grabbed a glass of red wine from a caterer's tray. "Well, just give it a look and let me know what you think. I left my card in the folder if you're interested."

"How did you end up here?" John pressed, more curious about Rose.

Searching for Ari and Tommy in the crowd, Rose pointed. "Those two. I met Ari at a wedding and she introduced me to Tommy but her roster was full. My girlfriend and I offered to shoot the event as a favor."

A knowing look came over John. "Those two were the best decisions I made at SDO. I found them as interns and kept them around. Plus, events like this are perfect for a portfolio drop."

"My thoughts exactly." Rose winked as she took a drink of her wine. "Thank you so much for your time, hopefully, I'll hear from you."

John nodded. "You will, Ms. Miller. Happy Holidays."

With that, Rose turned from the table and headed back to Drew. Once her face was hidden from John, she faked a scream which made Drew smirk.

From across the room, Drew pumped their fist and grinned.

Rose wasn't sure she would have been bold enough to believe in herself like this even a year ago. But with Drew by her side, everything felt possible and she was really starting to see her value as an artist.

“How’d it go?” Drew was eager to know the details.

Nodding, Rose smiled. “Good, he seemed friendly and liked my resume.”

Drew wrapped their arms around their girlfriend, excited to see what was to come. “I’m so happy for you. You deserve it.”

“Thank you, babe.” Rose kissed Drew’s cheek. “Want to start packing up?”

Wiggling their eyebrows, Drew started packing up their lights and equipment. They’d traveled light but there were tons of small pieces to keep track of.

Rose took a deep breath as she centered herself. With any luck, John would be in her email inbox Monday morning. And if he wasn’t, Rose would just keep on moving.

17

TAYLOR

“I’m serious, you better call.” Ari pointed her finger at Taylor, a serious scowl taking over her face.

Raising her hands in surrender, Taylor laughed. “I will, I swear.” She waved goodbye and started looking for Mac who was now stationed in front of the large windows overlooking the city.

“Hey, you.” Taylor smiled as she approached.

## Page 26

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:32 pm*

Mac's eyes wandered down her body. "Wow, this dress doesn't get old."

Rolling her eyes, Taylor watched Mac's face. "Someone's tipsy."

"Free champagne." Mac shrugged before grabbing Taylor's hand. "I want to step out onto the balcony. Come with me and tell me about your chat?"

With a nod, Taylor let Mackenzie guide her outside. Pushing open the glass door, Mac took in a deep breath of the fresh air.

Taylor felt like she'd been smacked in the face by the chilly breeze as her heels crunched the light layer of snow that had gathered on the balcony.

Settling next to the railing, Mac rubbed her hands together before taking off her emerald jacket and wrapping it around Taylor's bare shoulders. A blush rushed to Taylor's cheeks as she looked over at Mac's stunning face.

"So, how'd it go?" Mac smiled.

"Good." Taylor tucked a curly lock of hair behind her ear. "She was very eager to sign me. But she has a great office and I really liked what she saw for me."

Nodding, Mac bit her lip. "Do you think this is your agent?"

It was a big question, one Taylor wasn't entirely sure she was ready to answer just yet. After all, they'd just spoken and the champagne made everything seem like a good idea.

“We’ll see. I want to read the contract tomorrow and see what she comes up with for the commission split.” Taylor crossed her arms.

Mac rested her hand on Taylor’s tensed forearms. “I like this plan.”

As a smile took over Mac’s cheeks, Taylor grew suspicious. The balcony was cold but the massive snowflakes falling to Mac’s brunette hair and the glowing city below made for quite the romantic location.

“Mackenzie Bennett, what do you have planned?” Taylor raised an eyebrow.

Caught, Mac shrugged. “I have something small for you. I know we’ll do bigger gifts on Christmas but I don’t want to wait on this one.”

Trying not to get too excited, Taylor nodded. “Okay.”

Mac pulled her hand from Taylor’s arm and reached into her trouser pocket. Clenching her fist, she hid what was inside. “Close your eyes.”

Normally, Taylor would have argued. But today felt different. She did as she was told and held out her palms for Mac.

Something soft was placed in her hand.

“Open,” Mac whispered, keeping her fingers on Taylor’s open palm.

When Taylor’s eyes opened, her forehead wrinkled with confusion. “What is this?” She lifted the yellow felt to her eyes, reading the burned-in text: Bennett vs Young, 1st Match, June 2012.

Still unsure, Taylor lifted her gaze to Mac’s. “There’s no way, is this...”

“The ball from our first match. That summer back at camp.” Mac bit her lip, nervous it was a lame gift.

Taylor’s eyes softened. “You kept it, all that time?”

Nodding, Mac sighed. “Yeah. I kind of hoped I’d get to do this someday. And I wanted to see it hung on your tree this year. I didn’t want to wait any longer.”

“Mackenzie...” Taylor shook her head, feeling tears beginning to well in her eyes. It was hard to imagine the amount of years that ball had survived. How many moves had Mac remembered to delicately pack the tennis ball away? How many roommates had she kept safely out of reach?

“It’s kind of lame.” Mac rubbed the back of her neck.

Scoffing, Taylor placed her hands on Mac’s neck and pulled her in for a deep kiss, no longer worried about her lipstick. When they pulled apart, Taylor sighed. “It’s perfect. I can’t believe you did this.”

Beaming, Mac smiled. “Good.”

“Actually, I have something for you too.” Taylor bit her lip. “Not to steal your thunder.”

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:32 pm*

With a laugh, Mac eagerly closed her eyes. “Never, I’m hyped.”

Watching Mac’s strong hands held out in front of her, Taylor pulled her gift from her small purse. A light jingle filled the air as she set the item in Mac's hand. “Your turn.”

As soon as the metal hit Mac’s palm, she knew what it was. Before she even opened her eyes, Mac grinned. “Are you serious?”

“Yes.” Taylor nodded, meeting Mac’s eyes as they slowly opened.

There, in Mac’s huge palm was a small set of keys. She closed her fingers around them. “Is it too fast?”

Taylor shrugged. “Not for me, but if it is for you, that’s okay. I just know your lease is ending soon and I want to really try this. I don’t like that tree being just mine. I want this ornament on our tree next year.”

Mac’s breath hitched in her chest as she wrapped her arms around Taylor, pulling her into a tight hug. Mac’s musk filled Taylor’s nostrils, the warmth of her scent making all of Taylor's fears melt away.

When they finally pulled away, she couldn’t help but laugh.

“Is this how you pictured your year going?” Mac giggled.

Looking out over the city, Taylor shook her head. “Not at all, but thank god it did.”

And watching the snowfall, Taylor knew this was exactly where she was supposed to be – standing in the cold with the love of her life.

18

CASS

“Thanks for coming!” Cass waved to Taylor and Mac as they made their way downstairs, arm-in-arm.

From behind her, a hand landed on Cass’s shoulder. When she turned around, Tommy was standing there and watching a far table. “Can you tell Ari I said goodnight? I’ve gotta go hunt down some information on a mysterious Mistress Lavender.”

Cass’s forehead wrinkled at the strange words leaving Tommy’s mouth. But over the last year, Cass had learned one thing: Tommy’s going to be Tommy. So instead of trying to understand, Cass nodded. “You got it. Get home safe, Tom.”

Waving goodbye, Tommy disappeared to the elevator.

By now, the party was nearly empty. Near the back room entrance, Ari was saying goodnight to the catering staff and the decorator.

It had been a magical night, something Cass could have only dreamed of.

Watching Ari do her thing had been a complete pleasure.

From across the party, Ari spotted her girlfriend and smiled. Even from this distance, Cass could tell all Ari was thinking about was hopping into bed together and snuggling up with a cup of hot cocoa.

As she strode across the room, Cass couldn't stop thinking about something else.

Damn, she looks good in that suit.

But before her mind could get carried away, Ari was standing in front of her. "You about ready to go home?"

"Yeah, but there's one more thing I want to do." Cass smiled and grabbed Ari's hand, heading toward the windows with a view south.

As they took their place in front of the skyline, Cass's eyes followed Manhattan's avenues down toward the southern tip of the island. Speckled along the streets were shining Christmas displays, adding some winter magic to the concrete jungle.

Ari stood behind Cass, wrapping her arms around her stomach and resting her chin on Cassie's shoulder. "It's gorgeous."

They stood like that for a moment, watching the chunky snowflakes drifting down toward the ground.

"Thank you for all of your help, Cassie," Ari whispered.

Giggling, Cass shook her head. "I can't believe you pulled it off. You somehow pulled off a star-studded holiday party in less than two weeks."

Ari shrugged. "I couldn't have done it without you. You really came through for me."



*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:32 pm*

“Anything for you, darling.” Cass turned her head and planted a kiss on Ari’s lips.  
“Same time next year?”

With a giggle, Ari nodded and kissed her back.

Just as their kisses started to grow heated, bright overhead lights flicked on.

Blinking the bright lights away, Ari shook her head. “Want to get out of here?”

“Only if we’re going home together.” Cass teased.

Placing her hand on Cass’s waist, Ari guided her to the elevator bank. They waved goodbye to the cleanup staff who were hard at work with the venue now empty. Ari would have to come back the next day to ensure the place was spotless.

But for tonight, it was time to leave the winter wonderland.

As the elevator doors swung open, Ari held them for Cass to step through. They stood together at the center, watching as the doors started to swing shut.

Ari leaned down and whispered. “Merry Christmas, Cassie.”

Looking into her eyes, Cass smiled. “Merry Christmas, Ari.”