



The Daughter of a Fine Corporate Lawyer

by Barbara Anderson

*-This story closely follows the events of my story,
“**The Day Before the World Shattered**”*

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History turns on very small hinges...

...and so do our lives...

*The most seemingly insignificant choices can
change our lives in ways we can never imagine.*



*Consider what might, or might not, have happened if Catherine had decided to
go to dinner with her father or her best friend the night of...*

April 12th 1987

Cathy winced inwardly as she jauntily entered her father's office. *He called me 'Catherine,'* she noted. *That can't be good.*

Cathy Chandler had long since learned to recognize the subtle clues that told her a serious, but usually justified, discussion was coming her way. She had a hunch she knew just what it was about.

Nonchalantly tossing her overcoat and briefcase onto a nearby chair, Cathy took a seat and tried to keep the conversation light, doing her best to steer Charles' focus away from herself.

As they bantered back and forth, Charles invited her to join him for dinner with an old family friend. She already had plans with Tom for the evening, and as much as she didn't want to attend that either, it was a convenient reason to bow out.

"What about dinner tomorrow night?" Charles suggested hopefully, not yet willing to give up.

Cathy took his request as an opportunity to escape her father's scrutiny. Quickly scooping up her belongings, she said, "Well, let me get to my desk... check my calendar."

"You're *just* getting in?" he asked, seemingly surprised.

She winced inwardly again, then quickly offered, "Had a late night and had some errands to run today."

Charles looked at his favorite, daughter with a mix of skepticism and disapproval.

It was a lame excuse. She knew it and she could tell that he knew it too. *But what's he going to do?* she thought flippantly, *fire me?*

"Sue me." She shrugged as she responded to his unspoken rebuke.

"Well, it's a little late for *that*," he countered. "I should've sued you when you were five."

It was a little inside joke they'd had for years. It was something they both used to diffuse the tension when they couldn't come to an agreement over some trivial matter.

But to Charles *this* wasn't trivial. He was genuinely concerned about the future of his only child.

"What's up with you?" he asked, wondering why his daughter didn't seem to have her heart in her work anymore.

Did she ever? he wondered fleetingly, as if the idea had never occurred to him before... "You don't enjoy the work?" he asked in earnest. "You don't find it stimulating?"

Catherine Rose Chandler, never wanting to disappoint her father, knew she needed to tread carefully. Corporate law was *his* work. His *life's work*. And he loved it. Cathy knew very well, it had provided generously for them both and she didn't want to hurt him. She was also aware that he had always planned for her to

take over the Chandler side of the law firm from him one day. Until recently she had never given him a reason to believe otherwise.

She sighed. "When I think of corporate law 'stimulating' is *not* a word that immediately pops into mind," she admitted, surprising even herself with her uncustomary candor.

"But when you put your mind to it, you're a *fine* corporate lawyer," Charles insisted.

"No, Dad," she corrected. "I'm the *daughter* of a fine corporate lawyer."

Cathy kissed her father affectionately on the cheek and turned to leave.

Charles watched her momentarily then turned in frustration, and not a little consternation, toward the magnificent view he had of the New York City skyline.



Charles played Cathy's words over several times in his mind.

'When I think of corporate law, 'stimulating' is not a word that immediately pops into mind.'

Despite how the words stung, he couldn't deny the sincerity in her voice as she said them.

If I had been paying more attention, he chided himself, I might have realized it sooner. She's seemed bored and restless for months now. I foolishly attributed it to dissatisfaction with her personal life.

He also couldn't deny the truth in her parting statement, *'No, Dad. I'm the daughter of a fine corporate lawyer.'*

*Well, at least I know **that's** true, he admitted, as a matter of fact. She's right, I **am** a fine corporate lawyer... one of the best, if I do say so myself.*

Charles Chandler was not a conceited man. His long-deceased wife had cured him of that many years ago. But even Charles couldn't deny the truth of his daughter's observation. Corporate law had been his passion since his days in law school. The challenge of making and closing deals had excited him more than any

other aspect of litigation. Few things gave him as satisfaction much as seeing his clients build their personal wealth because of work he'd been a party to.

And of course, he had no problem with the fact that when his clients got richer, so did he.

"I *am* a fine corporate lawyer," he said aloud. "I've made a nice living from corporate law, to put it mildly. Is it too much to hope that my daughter would want that too?"

"*Perhaps it is, Charles,*" he heard a woman's voice answer.

Charles swiveled quickly from his city view to see who had spoken... but no one was there. The office was empty except for himself.

His furrowed brow denoted his confusion. "I could've sworn I heard..." Mid-sentence Charles caught sight of the photograph of his wife that had occupied a hallowed spot on his desk for more than twenty years.

Sitting down in his very expensive, custom-made leather desk chair, he reached for the ornate silver frame and drew it close.



"Was that you, My Dear?" he asked, stroking the glass reverently. "I swear, sometimes I can hear you as clearly as if you'd never left."

Caroline Chandler looked lovingly, yet silently out of the frame. Her beautiful face frozen in time, unravaged by the passage of the years.

"I need to begin turning all of this over to Cathy, Caroline. Now I'm not sure if she even wants it," he said as naturally as if she were

sitting in the room with him. "If you were here, I'm sure you would know what to do. How can I ask Cathy to take over for me when she doesn't want to be here as it is?"

"Ahem..."

Charles looked up to see his legal assistant, Marilyn Campbell standing just inside his office door, with a file in her hands. After an uncomfortable silence, Charles finally spoke. "You caught me," he said, unable to hide his embarrassment.

“Caught you?” Marilyn asked. “Doing what? Talking to your deceased wife?”

“You must think I’m crazy,” he concluded.

“Not at all,” she responded compassionately. “Would it make you feel any better to know that I talk to my Roger too sometimes? It’s perfectly normal, as far as I’m concerned. Just because they’re dead, doesn’t mean they’re fully... gone. And besides, you might just need an expert opinion from time to time.”

Charles gave her a lopsided grin. “Just the same, I’d appreciate it if you kept this just between the two of us.”

“Certainly, some people might not understand.”

“Exactly. Thank you, Marilyn.”

“I take it you haven’t told Cathy yet.”

“Told Cathy?” He scrutinized Marilyn closely. “Told Cathy what?”

“About your health, of course.”

Charles was a little taken aback. “How, may I ask, *do you* know about *that*?”

“I didn’t, but you just confirmed my suspicions. I’ve known you for nearly thirty years, Charles Chandler. I can tell when something is weighing on you. Besides, Peter Alcott has been visiting your office more than usual lately. I know the two of you are friends, but I had a feeling they were more than mere social calls.

“My guess is...” she continued. “...that he’s making ‘house calls’ here at the office, because you won’t come to his.”

Neither confirming nor denying her conjecture, Charles just stared at her, trying his best not to betray his astonishment at her uncanny intuition.

“On top of that,” she went on, “...you blocked off two hours this morning and told Joan to let you know as soon as Cathy got in. You were going to tell her, weren’t you? And you were going to ask her to start taking on more responsibility here.”

Staring back at her boss unflinchingly, she finally asked, “Am I close?”

Charles stood and turned his back on her, once again viewing the skyline. He sighed heavily in defeat. “My entire life there have only been three people I could never keep the truth from,” he began. “My mother, my wife...”

Then turning to her, he said, “...and *you*.”

“That was something I truly admired in Caroline,” Marilyn reminisced about her dear friend. “She never sugar-coated the truth, and she couldn’t bear to be lied to.”

He stood quietly, as if drawing strength from the power of the miraculous metropolis that stood before him.

“How bad is it?” she asked quietly.

Charles sighed heavily. “Peter says... if I follow his advice: stick to a strict diet, take my medication religiously, avoid undue stress, and drastically reduce my workload, I could live for five more years... ten, if I’m *really* lucky. He says they’re making great strides in heart disease research these days. Who knows? Maybe by then there will be something more that can be done.”

“And if you don’t... follow his advice?” she asked, not sure she really wanted to know the answer.

Charles chuffed a little as he recalled Peter’s words.

“I could have a heart attack or a stroke at any moment. I believe his exact words were ‘You’re a ticking time bomb, Charles.’”

“Peter certainly isn’t one to mince words, is he?” she asked sardonically.

“No, I don’t suppose he is.” Charles sighed again, and sat down at his desk, ready to retire the entire subject.

Holding out a hand to Marilyn, he asked. “What have you got for me?”

Marilyn had nearly forgotten her original reason for coming into the office in the first place. “Oh, yes... these are copies of the proposals for the settlement conference this afternoon.” She handed them to him. “I thought you would like to see them beforehand.”

“Cathy drafted these?” he asked as he flipped through them, clearly impressed.

“Yes. She asked me to give them a final once over.”

Charles looked a little closer. “And what’s *your* assessment?” he asked searchingly.

“They’re brilliant, as far as I can tell. I think both sides should be more than satisfied with her proposals,” Marilyn replied. “She’s become a top-notch corporate attorney.”

Then she added. “She’s a regular chip off the old block.”

When she said it, Marilyn noticed a shadow cross Charles’ face. “I’m sorry, did I say something wrong?”

“No, you haven’t said anything wrong,” Charles replied, with a furrowed brow.

“It’s just that...” He paused mid-sentence, shook his head, and closed the file.

“Just that what?” she asked.

Having a feeling he needed a listening ear, she sat in the chair vacated by Cathy only a few minutes before.

"I've always thought that when the time was right," Charles began. "Cathy would take my place behind this desk. I just assumed that she wanted that too."

"And now you have reason to think otherwise?"

"Lately... she seems... distracted... less..."

"Less invested in the work?" Marilyn said, finishing his sentence. She couldn't deny that she had noticed it too.

Charles nodded. "Yes, less invested," he repeated. "She's always had a bad habit of keeping irregular work hours."

Marilyn smiled and clarified his statement. "You mean she's perpetually late."

Charles nodded. "Yes, but lately... it's gotten so much worse. I mean, she just got into the office a few minutes ago... and she has this settlement conference at three o'clock."

"Yes, I *have* noticed her punctuality issues have become worse of late... but I don't think it's affected her work," Marilyn assured him. "Charles, I've been her mentor for years. As far as I can tell, she still meets or exceeds all expectations. Her accounts are all up to date. I've never heard a single complaint from any of our clients. And everyone in the office loves her. So, is it really a big problem?"

Her words gave him no comfort. Shaking his head, he replied. "That may all be true, Marilyn. But if it was any of the other junior associates in the office, would we let it slide?"

"No... I suppose not," she replied. "But Cathy isn't any other junior associate. She's your daughter."

"Exactly! *She is my daughter!* And if she's going to take over this law firm one day, she needs to set a better example!"

He stood up and turned once again to the city view. "I have to begin to let go of some of my responsibilities here. I have no choice, now that I'm..."

"Now that you're... ill?"

"Yes..." He sighed and shook his head. "But Cathy said something just now that makes me think... *makes me fear*... that she's not ready to take them on... that she may not *ever* be ready. Maybe things with Tom Gunther are getting more serious... maybe she would rather get married and start a family... than continue working here."

“That’s a lot of speculation, Charles. It sounds like you need to have a serious conversation with your daughter.”

Charles sat back down and looked at his friend sorrowfully. “That was my plan this morning... but there’s no time now. And I have no idea if this is what she wants anymore.”

“Talk to your daughter, Charles,” Marilyn insisted. “Or are you afraid of getting the answers?”

Charles looked at her hopefully. “Could you talk to her? ... Maybe find out what she’s thinking?”

“Yes... I can talk to her... Cathy has confided in me many times over the years. But I *won’t* report back to you. I won’t be your spy.”

Charles looked shocked.

“I’ve never betrayed her trust, Charles, and I’m not going to do it now,” she explained. “*That* is a line I won’t cross. This is something that you need to work out with your daughter.”

“So, you’re saying you’re not going to bail me out. Is that your firm answer?”

“Talk to your daughter, Charles... *and soon*.” Marilyn rose and headed for the door.

“Yes, Marilyn,” he replied with a wry smile.



As soon as the door closed behind her he reached into his desk drawer, pulled out a bottle of pills and placed two of them under his tongue.



Cathy went straight to her office and closed the door firmly behind her. Sitting at her desk, she breathed deeply.

‘When I think of corporate law, ‘stimulating’ is not a word that immediately pops into mind.’

As her parting words to her father echoed in her mind, she was filled with regret. Despite the truth of it, she never wanted to cause her father pain. But it was becoming increasingly undeniable.

Catherine Rose Chandler had tried mightily for the last five years, under her father's tutelage, to develop an interest in corporate law. She loved her father and the last thing she ever wanted to do was disappoint him. But over the last several months it had become increasingly obvious that it was never going to happen.

'But when you put your mind to it, you're a fine corporate lawyer,' he had insisted.

Daddy's not wrong, she acknowledged inwardly. I am good at it. That's not the problem. I can do it with my eyes closed...

The problem was that she had begun to realize she didn't find it personally rewarding.

Is this all there is? she'd been asking herself a lot lately. *Is this all my life is going to be? Endless contracts, settlement conferences, wheeling and dealing, cocktail parties, and shopping for shoes and handbags I don't need? Is this all my life will ever be?*

Over the previous year, Cathy had increasingly felt a deep-seated hunger for something more... something meaningful. She just wasn't sure what it was.

She looked at her watch and groaned in frustration.

Just get through the afternoon, Cathy, she told herself. You'll have the entire weekend to figure out what to do next.

She opened the file for the settlement conference she would be attending in less than an hour. She already knew all of the procedural formalities involved in the deal. Staring at the tentative proposals without really seeing them, she finally closed the file and pushed it away from her in disgust.

Standing up, she stared out of her large office window that overlooked the southeast end of Central Park. From this vantage point, the people on the street, nearly 50 stories below, looked small, and the cars and taxis honked out the music of the bustling city.

Overlooking the park, she smiled softly, and recalled how much she'd loved it as a child. She had many fond memories of riding the carousel, going to the zoo with her parents, picnics in Sheep's Meadow, flying kites in the spring, and summer concerts in the park. It was figuratively and literally the backdrop of her childhood.

Cathy recalled that after her mother's death, she became obsessed with climbing trees there. She'd been searching for something... something even she had not fully comprehended.

Standing this far above the park now, she still looked for that nebulous something to fill the hole her mother's death had left in her life.

She smiled, recalling the benefit reunion concert that Simon and Garfunkel had given there in September of 1981. She'd never seen as many people in the park as she did that night. Some estimated that as many as 600,000 people had crowded into the park that night.

It was around the same time she began working for her father's law firm.

Was that really more than five years ago? she wondered.

Her smile faded as her thoughts turned dark.



Cathy and her fiancé, Steven Bass were attending the concert with a small group of friends from college. The liquor and loose joints flowed freely all evening. So much so, that anyone attending the concert couldn't help but get a little high from the giant cloud of secondhand pot smoke hanging over the crowd.

Steven became more inebriated as the night wore on, becoming increasingly obnoxious and uninhibited with every swig of random bottles of cheap liquor that came his way, and taking hits off of every passing joint.

Cathy was embarrassed, to say the least. When she quietly asked him to stop drinking, he became belligerent, loudly belittling her 'holier than thou' attitude, her clothes, and even her hair, referring to her derisively as 'Saint Catherine'. For the rest of the evening, he made her the brunt of crude and cruel jokes that made their friends uncomfortable, to say the least.

When the concert ended, Cathy found herself feeling very alone in the thinning crowd as all of their friends said their 'goodbyes' and went their separate ways.

Making their way across The Great Lawn toward the 79th Street Transverse, Steven held her tightly by the wrist and berated her loudly. "I hope you're happy!" as he yanked her arm.

"Steven, let go, you're hurting me," she said, as he steered her roughly through the crowd.

Squeezing her wrist even tighter, he jerked her around to face him. "You ruined the concert for everyone! They all left because of you!"

"They left because the concert is over," she argued, trying to wrench herself free of him. "Let... go..."



"You look like you're a million miles away."

Cathy turned at the sound of Marilyn's voice, silently thanking her for rescuing her from sinking farther into the dark abyss of her regrets. She didn't realize she was rubbing her wrist as if she could still feel the bruises Steven had left there so long ago.

Marilyn smiled sympathetically. "You might find it interesting to know that your father stands at his window just like that when he has something on his mind. Like father, like daughter, I suppose."

Cathy huffed. "I don't think so. I'm pretty sure I'm a huge disappointment to him."

"Did he say that?" Marilyn sounded skeptical.

"No," Cathy admitted, looking down at the carpet. "But that's how I feel... like I'm letting him down... like I'm letting everyone down."



"Because you don't love corporate law the way he does?" Marilyn guessed.

Cathy looked up in shock. "Is it that obvious?"

"I've known you since you were a little girl. You've been unhappy and distracted for a while now." Marilyn waited a moment and added, "But it's not just the work, is it?"

Cathy looked at Marilyn, her eyes swimming with unshed tears.

"Let me guess... Tom Gunther?" Marilyn asked. "I guess that means he isn't Mr. Right."

"Haha!" Cathy laughed unexpectedly as tears rolled down her cheeks.

Cathy quickly reached across her desk and grabbed a tissue. Realizing it just wouldn't do to show up to the settlement conference with red swollen eyes and smeared makeup.

"I must look awful," she said.

"You look beautiful, *as always*," Marilyn said.

As Cathy dabbed her face, she replied, "You're just saying that because you love me."

"That doesn't make it any less true," Marilyn assured her. "I get the feeling you could use a listening ear." Then looking at her watch, she said, "We have a little while before the settlement conference. So, let's just have a good talk."

She walked across the room and Cathy followed.

"You're going to the conference?" Cathy asked.

"Your father asked me to take his place," Marilyn explained.

As they made themselves comfortable on the couch, Marilyn spoke first. "So, tell me, Cathy. What is it that's been weighing you down?" She had a strong feeling she knew what it was. But she also knew that Cathy needed to come to her own conclusion.

Marilyn had become a substitute maternal figure and mentor in Cathy's life after her mother died tragically. She had always tried to be available with a listening ear, a shoulder to cry on, and generally a treasured friend. Now it was no different.

Looking down at her hands, Cathy gathered her thoughts. Finally shaking her head, she began. "I've worked here for about five years, Marilyn."

"Mmm hmm," Marilyn agreed.

"A lot longer if you count the summers I worked in the mail room and then interned for you."

Marilyn smiled wistfully. "I enjoyed that time working together... watching you grow up and work your way up through the ranks."

"I enjoyed that too." Cathy smiled for a moment. "But now... *I don't know*."

"I have a feeling you *do*... know."

"I feel so ungrateful, Marilyn. I have a life that most people can only dream of. I have a great job, a great apartment in a prime location, a successful boyfriend... *everything* a girl could want."

"It sounds great on paper, doesn't it?" Marilyn asked, with a sympathetic smile. "So, what's the problem?"

"The problem is..." Cathy groaned in frustration. "That I didn't achieve any of it on my own. *Everything* I have is because I'm Charles Chandler's daughter... because I've lived a charmed life of privilege."

"That's not true, Cathy," Marilyn insisted. "You graduated from law school with honors, and you passed the bar exam with flying colors, if I recall. **YOU** did that, Cathy... on your own."

Cathy couldn't argue with that. "And since then?" she asked. "Honestly, I've accomplished *nothing* on my own since then. I have this job because I'm the boss's daughter. I have my apartment because of this cushy job. And I'm pretty sure Tom only wants me because I'm the beautiful daughter of Charles Chandler, the successful corporate attorney."

"Why would you think that?" Marilyn asked doubtfully.

"Because Tom accidentally let it slip last night when we were at dinner. *That's why!* He wants me on his arm at his party tonight, so he can show members of the City Planning Commission that 'Charles Chandler trusts him with his most valuable possession.'"

Marilyn was appalled. "Why that slimy, low-down, snake!"

"But that's not the main problem... I know how much Daddy loves what he does. He's spent his life building this firm. But I... I've been here for long enough to know that I am *never* going to love it like he does. In fact... **I hate it!**"

There, she thought, as she dropped her face into her hands, *I've finally said it out loud.*

"But you're a fine corporate lawyer, Cathy."

"That's what Daddy said." Cathy chuffed at the praise. "*I'm not!*" she insisted.

"I'm the *daughter* of a fine corporate lawyer, Marilyn. There is a *distinct* difference. I will *never* have the passion Dad has for all of this. I've tried... *really* I have, but it's *no use*. The truth is, I'm bored out of my mind."

"I've seen you in action, Cathy. You're a brilliant and talented lawyer. Even when you work half the number of hours that everyone else here does... you still run circles around most of them."

Cathy nodded and sighed. "Yes, I *do* know that... and you may have also noticed that I take full advantage of it. But I don't want to break Daddy's heart."

"You mean by quitting corporate law?"

Cathy looked at her guiltily. "That and..."

Marilyn finished her sentence. "... by breaking things off with Tom Gunther."

Cathy threw her head back and stared at the ceiling. "Daddy says, Tom is our best client... and he *personally* introduced us. I think he's hoping that it will... lead to something more."

Marilyn thought she understood. "Something more...? Like marriage? Like grandchildren?" she asked, looking for specifics.

Cathy shuddered at the thought and shrugged. "Maybe... I don't know," she said, in frustration. "Daddy says, I could do a lot worse than Tom Gunther." She huffed as she recalled his words.

Marilyn weighed the statement. "I suppose, technically, your father isn't wrong. You *could* do a lot worse than Mr. Gunther."

"Yes, but..."

"But I'm pretty sure," Marilyn said, "...that '*you could do a lot worse...*' isn't the kind of foundation to build a happy life on, is it?"

Cathy shook her head, grateful that her friend had so succinctly described her feelings.

"Sometimes I think about Mother and Dad and how much they loved each other. Is it too much to want that for myself?"

Without waiting for Marilyn to answer, she continued. "When I was a little girl, and they thought I was sleeping I would sneak down the stairs and watch them, in each other's arms, dancing to Frank Sinatra in Daddy's study. Mother would look at him as if he was the only man on earth. And Daddy would look at her like... like..."

"Like he was the luckiest man in the world that someone as wonderful as *her* loved *him*?" Marilyn asked.

"You saw it too?" Cathy asked, surprised that someone else knew.

"Anyone with eyes could see it." Marilyn smiled wistfully at the memory. "What they had... together... was something very rare. Oh, I loved my Roger. We had a good marriage, and I miss him terribly, even after all this time. But when Caroline passed, a light went out of Charles that never came back. It nearly killed him. If it wasn't for you, I think it might have. *You became his world, Cathy.*"

Now they both had tears in their eyes.

"Tell me the truth, Cathy," Marilyn asked. "Does Tom Gunther make you happy? Even a little bit?"

It was clear by the look on Cathy's face as she shook her head from side to side. "No. In fact... lately..." she paused and sighed heavily. "Lately, I can hardly stand to be around him or let him touch me."

"Well then, as far as I'm concerned, *that's* your answer," Marilyn declared.

Cathy looked at Marilyn as she chewed her lower lip. "But if I break it off with Tom, we could lose him as a client. I don't want to cause trouble for Daddy or the firm because I'm such a flake."

Marilyn took both of Cathy's hands in hers and squeezed them tight. "You listen to me, young lady, your father loves you more than anything else, *including this law firm!* What he wants the most is for you to be happy. If Tom Gunther *doesn't* make you happy, then it's time to cut him loose, and let the chips fall where they may."

"Love *isn't* a business deal, my dear girl. When it comes to something as important as *this*, you must *always* follow your heart, or you'll *never* be happy."

Cathy looked at Marilyn with a look of shock. "Follow my heart," she repeated. "That's exactly what Jenny told me last night... nearly verbatim."

Marilyn smiled and nodded. "Well... it's good to know you have such wise friends."

Cathy chuckled.

After a short pause, Marilyn added softly, "And if corporate law doesn't make you happy, Cathy... then it's time for you to figure out what does. Life is too short to spend it doing something that makes you unhappy."

The tears began to flow again. "But Daddy—"

Squeezing Cathy's hands again she interrupted, "But Daddy, *nothing*. There comes a time in life when you have to stop trying to live up to other people's expectations and have the courage to follow your own heart... *and your own path*. Your father is a big boy. He'll get over it.

"What you and Charles need is to sit down and have a good long talk. There are clearly things *you* need to say to *him*. And things *he* needs to say to *you* too."

Cathy backed up to look at her friend. "What do you mean? Is something wrong with Dad?"

Marilyn smiled at her indulgently. "That's between you and your father."

Cathy nodded. "He wants to have dinner with me tomorrow night. I'll let him know I'm available before I leave for the day."

Then looking at her watch, Marilyn realized it was time to get back to business.

“Now, clean yourself up. We have a settlement conference to get to.”



Cathy poked her head into her father's office at the end of the day.

“Hi, Dad,” she said.

“Cathy,” he said, always delighted to see her. “How did the settlement conference go?”

Cathy smiled. “It went great. Everyone left happy, the contracts are signed, and no one will be going to court.”

“Well, it doesn't get any better than that, does it?”

“I suppose not. I'm heading out, I just wanted to say goodbye.”

“Leaving the office a little early, aren't you?” Charles was a little surprised, considering how late she had come in.

“I've got to go home and get ready for Tom's party. How late will you be working?”

Charles laughed. “I'm meeting Hal Sherwood at Tavern on the Green at seven o'clock. I thought I would get a little more done here before I head out. There's still time for you to join us. Just tell Tom I wouldn't let you out of it.”

Cathy smiled. “I'm tempted, *believe me*, but I promised Tom I would be there. Besides, I need to talk to him about something tonight, and it can't wait. Is your invitation for tomorrow night still open?”

“Absolutely!” Charles couldn't hide his delight that she had accepted his invitation. “I thought you'd forgotten. What are you in the mood for?”

“I don't know.” Cathy shrugged. “Italian? Rossini's maybe?”

“Rossini's it is,” he agreed enthusiastically. “I'll make the reservations. How does seven sound?”

“Sounds perfect. I'll meet you there... tomorrow at seven.” She kissed him once more on the cheek. “Love you, Dad.”

“I love you too, Sweetheart.”

Charles' heart was a little lighter as he watched Cathy leave this time.

Maybe I'm worrying about nothing, he told himself. Maybe it will all be fine.



Cathy stepped off the elevator on the 18th floor of her apartment building and smiled. She felt that a weight had been lifted after her talk with Marilyn.

'Follow your heart,' Marilyn said.

Cathy dropped her purse and briefcase onto her bed, removed her business jacket, and slipped out of her shoes in record time, then headed for the balcony.

Leaning against the bricks, she spread her arms and breathed deeply of the early promise of spring in the air. The day had been unusually warm for this early in the season, reaching a high of 71 degrees, but no one was complaining.

One of the things she loved about her high-rise apartment at Central Park West was her vantage point of the city, and the park she loved. During warm weather the evening breeze would occasionally carry with it the fragrance of whatever flowers were blooming in the park below.

This evening the air held the slight odor of petrichor; the heady scent of the soil awakening after rain. It was an unmistakable harbinger of new life after a frigid winter. Proof that sooner or later, all winters end.

No matter what was carried on the breeze, Cathy's balcony was her safe place... the one place in all the world where she could be herself without the judgment of anyone else. It was truly the only place she could feel the freedom to be her true self: Catherine Rose Chandler, and whatever that might mean.

"You have to follow your heart, or you'll never be happy." Jenny and Marilyn had both told her.

Can it really be that easy? Cathy asked herself. *Is my destiny and the way I live my life really up to me?* she wondered.

I've spent so long trying to please Daddy, and Tom, and countless other people, I'm not sure I even know how to start.

Deep in thought, Cathy lost all track of time. What seemed like minutes was nearly an hour. She would have stood there longer if a knock on the door hadn't drawn her back to consciousness.

"Cathy, it's Tom. Are you here?"

By the time she reached the door, he was pounding loudly. "CATHY!"

She rushed to unlock all of the bolts, and let him in.

"Are you kidding me, Cathy?" He looked at her in dismay. "You're *not* ready? You said I could count on you?"

"You can..." I'm sorry, Tom," Cathy responded, completely forgetting about the advice she had received from her friends.

“I lost all track of time. I *promise* I’ll be ready in five minutes.”

“You had better be,” he said through clenched teeth. “This night is very important to me!”

Rushing into the bedroom, Cathy opened her closet and grabbed the first dress she found and threw it on. Then looking in the mirror, she grimaced. It was an expensive, designer cocktail dress she had purchased in Paris. She hadn’t worn it often because she didn’t really like it. The off-the-shoulder style made her feel cheap and exposed.

Too bad, she told herself. *There’s no time to be picky*. She quickly freshened up her make-up and ran a quick brush through her hair. Looking in the mirror, she realized her hair looked limp after a long day.

That won’t do, she concluded.

Then fishing through the vanity drawer, she pulled out some black hair clips that would blend in with her hair. Pulling her hair back, she quickly secured it and sprayed it for good measure.

That will have to do, she concluded as she grabbed a pair of dangly, silver earrings, and slipped her feet into a pair of black satin pumps.

“Cathy!” Tom yelled impatiently. “Hurry up!”

“Almost ready!” she called back.

Then reaching into the closet again, she retrieved a black and burgundy evening cloak, and a matching burgundy clutch. It only took a few seconds to grab the essentials from her purse. Her apartment keys, some cash, her ID card, and lipstick were all the clutch would hold, and all she would need for the evening.

“It’s about time,” Tom said, opening the door.

Cathy smiled tentatively, thinking he was opening the door for her. It was a small gesture that indicated he wasn’t angry.

Unfortunately, she was mistaken.

“Hurry up,” he said sharply, as he exited in front of her without even looking back.

She sighed and followed him dejectedly.

The elevator ride was silent. It was now clear to Cathy that Tom was seething with anger. On the ground floor, he held her arm a little too tight as he steered her toward the lobby doors.

“Let go of me, Tom,” she said softly.

He didn't respond.

"Let Go!" she said loudly, wrenching herself free.

Tom stopped and looked around. He was mortified to see Roger, the doorman, and a few residents of the building had also stopped what they were doing and were staring at them both.

His angry expression changed suddenly, and he smiled charmingly. "I'm so sorry, Cathy. I was only trying to hurry you along. We're late for the party, you know, and our taxi is waiting."

Catherine's face flushed with embarrassment as she realized that somehow, Tom had managed to make it look like she was irrational and overreacting, in front of her neighbors.

"Are you coming?" he asked with a smile, as he gallantly opened the door for her.

Attempting to stifle her anger, she walked out the door and into the waiting taxi.

The ride to the party was quiet. Tom was still agitated with Cathy for making him late.

Cathy sat silently wondering how she had gotten herself here. *So much for choosing my own destiny*, she thought. *I should have just told Tom to go to the party without me. I should have told him we are over and gone out with Jen or my father instead. Why do I let him manipulate me into doing things I don't want to do?*

Marilyn's searching question from earlier in the day came to mind: *"Tell me the truth, Cathy, does Tom Gunther make you happy? Even a little bit?"*

"No!" she inadvertently said out loud.

"What?" Tom asked. "What did you say?"

Cathy was embarrassed again. She shook her head and smiled nervously.

"Nothing, I... I was just thinking out loud."

"Well, we're here." He leaned forward and pressed several bills into the hand of the taxi driver, while a valet rushed to open the taxi door for Cathy.

Tom appeared by her side and offered her his arm. Cathy was a little surprised, considering how angry he had been only minutes earlier.

"Is this for show?" she asked, linking arms with him.

"You better believe it is," he said with his most charming smile.

That's funny, she thought. *I've never realized how much Tom's smile makes him look like the Cheshire Cat.*

The ridiculous thought made her smile, giving those nearby the impression that they were the perfect, happy couple.

Then under his breath, he said, "Whatever you do tonight, Cathy, *don't* embarrass me."

Her smile faded as quickly as it came.

The party was in full swing as they entered the banquet room. Pretentious glamour oozed from every direction. A large ice sculpture of Tom's latest architectural vision towered over the buffet table. Clinking glasses and mindless small talk filled the air.

Everything about the party irked Cathy. *I wish I was anywhere but here*, she thought.

She was relieved when Tom caught sight of a member of the City Planning Commission and left her standing alone as he wined and dined prospective investors.

Fine, Cathy thought, *I'll finally have a few moments to myself*.

She made her way to the far side of the room, hoping to stay out of the fray. *I'm not in any mood to socialize tonight*.

She groaned inwardly when she heard someone say, "Cathy Chandler? Is that you?"

Looking up, Cathy recognized the face of an old friend. "Eve? Eve Cogsworth? Is that you? I haven't seen you in years. How are you doing?"

The woman smiled. "It's Eve Brooks now... but not for long. I'm getting divorced."

"I'm sorry to hear that," Cathy replied compassionately. "Do you have a few minutes, we can sit and catch up."

Over an hour later, Tom found Cathy still sitting at a table at the back of the banquet hall.

As he approached her, he could hear a part of the conversation she was having with one of the guests.

"... He told me just to pretend like he was dead," the woman said.

"I'm sorry, Eve," Cathy replied. "Things'll turn around."

Leaning over Cathy, Tom asked, "How are you doing? You all right?"

Feeling much calmer than when they had arrived, Cathy smiled up at him. "Fine. Eve and I haven't seen each other since college."

“We were just catching up,” Eve explained.

“Good...” Tom said coldly. Then looking at Cathy, he said, “I need to talk to you.”

“Would you excuse us for a minute?” Cathy said.

Tom placed his hand on the small of Cathy’s back and steered her to a more secluded area.

“What’s with you?” Tom asked, clearly irritated.

“What do you mean?”

“Well, you’ve been sitting over there listening to her blubber, half the night...”

“She’s going through a rough time,” Cathy explained. “She and I used to be good friends—”

“I know her. She’s a lush.” Tom said with disdain. “She was married to a lush. She’s a complete loser.”

“You’re very compassionate,” Cathy said sarcastically. She was appalled that he would say such a thing out loud and hoped that Eve hadn’t heard him.

Taking her gently by the wrist, he said, “Come on, stick with me, there’s someone I want you to meet.”

Feeling him take her wrist suddenly triggered an old, unpleasant memory of Steven Bass.

“Oh Tom,” she said, “I’m just not into it tonight, I’m sorry.”

“I thought I could count on you,” he said, trying to manipulate her by making her feel guilty.

“You can,” she tried to assure him.

“Maybe I expect too much,” he insisted, increasing the pressure on her wrist.

But his manipulation wasn’t working on Cathy this time. With each passing second, she was feeling the need to get as far away from him as she could.

“This is a party... it’s *not* brain surgery,” she said.

It was clear she wasn’t being swayed by his attempt to control her, and he was quickly losing patience.

“I really don’t have time for this now,” he said in frustration.

Tired of Tom speaking to her like a child, Catherine’s good manners were beginning to wear thin.

“Frankly, I don’t like being told who I can talk to,” she said.

This only made Tom double down on his condescending tone. “Then show better judgment!”

Suddenly, Marilyn’s words from earlier in the day echoed in her mind. *‘If Tom Gunther doesn’t make you happy, then it’s time to cut him loose, and let the chips fall where they may.’*

Cathy had finally had enough of Tom Gunther, “*Fine!*” Cathy said, fuming with anger. “I think I’ll call it a night.”

“That’s not an option,” he insisted, attempting to hold her wrist even tighter.

“Oh, it’s not?” she said, pulling away from his grip.

He had no choice but to let her go, to avoid making more of a scene than he already had.

She stopped momentarily at the table and retrieved her coat and her clutch, thanking her lucky stars that she had remembered to put some cash in it.

“Eve,” she said to her friend. “I’m sorry, I’m going to have to call you tomorrow.”

Then without turning to see if Tom was following her, she left the restaurant. She couldn’t remember a time when she had been so angry. It made her feel strangely powerful.

I’m finally taking my destiny and my life into my own hands, she thought.



As Catherine Rose Chandler stepped out of the hotel lobby, and into the dark, New York City night, she had no idea that a whole new chapter in her life was about to begin.

Running to the curb, she waved one arm, and yelled...

“TAXI!!!”



*History turns on very small hinges...
...and so do our lives...*