



SCARLETT HEELS



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→ A NOVEL ←

Chapter 1 - Rejection

"I'm sorry, Miss Scarlett."

The man closed the folder and pushed it back across the polished conference table.

"I don't believe this business has a future."

Scarlett nodded.

"I understand."

She accepted the folder, stood up and offered a polite smile.

"Thank you for your time."

He returned the smile.

"I wish you the very best of luck."

"I appreciate that."

A moment later the elevator doors closed.

Scarlett stood alone.

She looked down at the folder in her hands.

On the cover, embossed in dark red letters, were two words.

Scarlett Heels

The elevator reached the lobby.

Outside, the afternoon air was cool.

People hurried along the pavement, each absorbed in their own

destination.

Scarlett walked without haste.

After a few blocks she stopped beside a quiet park bench.

From her handbag she took a small notebook.

Inside was a neat handwritten list.

She crossed out another name.

Closed the notebook.

Put it back into her bag.

Then she continued walking.

Twenty minutes later she unlocked the narrow wooden door of an old workshop.

The familiar scent of leather welcomed her home.

Rows of hand tools hung neatly above a worn workbench.

Wooden shoe lasts lined the shelves.

Nothing had moved since morning.

Scarlett placed the folder on the bench.

For a moment she simply looked at it.

Then she slid it aside.

There was more important work to do.

A single high heel stood beneath the bright work lamp.

She picked it up carefully.

Turned it slowly in her hands.

Beautiful.

But not yet right.

She reached for a fine file.

Only three careful strokes.

She stopped.

Looked again.

Better.

Still...

not perfect.

She smiled to herself.

"Almost."

The shoe returned to the bench.

Beside it lay several sketches.

Not of shoes.

Of a room.

A reception desk.

A consultation area.

A walkway.

Strange devices stood beside it, connected by arrows and handwritten notes.

Across the top of the page she had written only two words.

Tailor Lounge

Scarlett studied the sketch for a long moment.

One day.

Women would no longer be measured with tape measures.

Every foot would become a precise three-dimensional model.

Every pair of heels would be created especially for the woman who would wear them.

Not custom-made for the wealthy.

Custom-made for everyone who valued perfection.

She smiled.

The technology did not exist yet.

At least not in a form she could afford.

But one day...

someone would build it.

Until then...

she knew another way.

She reached for a measuring tape hanging from a small hook.

Her fingers ran across it almost absent-mindedly.

For now...

this would do.

Scarlett opened the folder once more.

Inside, behind the financial projections and market analyses, rested a single sentence she had written months before.

The finest high heels in the world deserve to be made for the woman who wears them.

She read it once.

Closed the folder again.

Tomorrow there would be another meeting.

Another investor.

Another opportunity to explain what nobody seemed to understand yet.

She switched off the work lamp.

The workshop fell silent.

Tomorrow she would try again.

Chapter 2 - One Pair at a Time

Morning returned to the little workshop.

Scarlett unlocked the door.

The bell above it rang softly.

Today there were no investors.

Only customers.

Mrs. Harrison had brought a pair of Italian pumps with a broken heel.

Mr. Collins wanted expensive leather shoes restored after years of wear.

Repairs paid the bills.

Scarlett never complained about them.

She enjoyed bringing beautiful shoes back to life.

But every evening...

after the last customer had left...

the workshop became hers again.

She opened a different notebook.

Not accounts.

Not repairs.

Designs.

Measurements.

Ideas.

The first prototype still stood beneath the work lamp.

She smiled.

Then reached for another piece of leather.

"If I'm going to make the finest heels in the world..."

"...I'd better make a second pair."

Weeks passed.

Then months.

The little workshop developed its own rhythm.

Morning belonged to repairs.

Evening belonged to Scarlett Heels.

Sometimes...

someone noticed.

A customer collecting repaired shoes would stop in front of the workbench.

"What are those?"

"My own designs."

"They're beautiful."

Occasionally...

one of those conversations ended differently.

"I'd like a pair."

The first order felt unreal.

The second less so.

By the third...

Scarlett stopped wondering whether anyone would ever buy her shoes.

Instead she began wondering whether she could make them fast enough.

Not quickly.

Never quickly.

Properly.

Recommendations travelled quietly.

One customer became two.

Two became five.

The appointment book slowly filled.

Not with repairs.

With names.

Women willing to wait.

Women willing to travel.

Women who wanted shoes made especially for them.

Scarlett looked at the growing list one evening.

Then she opened her business plan.

The pages had changed.

Margins were filled with handwritten notes.

Entire paragraphs had been crossed out and rewritten.

Supplier names.

Leather samples.

Manufacturing ideas.

Cost calculations.

Nothing about the dream had changed.

Only the path towards it had become clearer.

She turned another page.

One sentence had been underlined several times.

Never compromise quality.

Scarlett smiled.

"Never."

She closed the folder.

Outside, evening settled over the little workshop.

Tomorrow there would be repairs.

Tomorrow evening there would be another pair of Scarlett Heels.

Slowly...

very slowly...

the dream was beginning to pay for itself.

Chapter 3 - Another Name

The little workshop had changed.

Not in size.

Not in appearance.

But in rhythm.

The bell above the door rang more often now.

Repairs still paid the rent.

Scarlett welcomed every customer with the same calm smile.

A pair of riding boots.

An expensive leather handbag.

The bell above the door rang.

Scarlett looked up and smiled.

"Good morning, Mrs. Parker."

The woman laughed and placed a pair of italian heels carefully on the counter.

"I think they're finally beyond saving."

Scarlett turned one of the shoes over in her hands.

She smiled.

"No."

"They've still got a few years left."

"And besides: they're your favourites."

Mrs. Parker laughed.

Scarlett inspected the worn sole once more.

"If you'd like to wait..."

"...about half an hour."

"No problem."

Scarlett pointed towards a small seating area beside the window.

"Please make yourself comfortable."

"There are a few magazines."

"Thank you."

Mrs. Parker settled into the chair while Scarlett disappeared behind her workbench.

Soon only the familiar sounds of the workshop remained.

The quiet scrape of leather.

The gentle tapping of a small hammer.

The steady rhythm of practised hands.

A few minutes later...

"Oh, honestly..."

Scarlett glanced up.

"Hm?"

Mrs. Parker rolled her eyes at the magazine.

"This Jennifer again."

Scarlett smiled faintly.

"The actress?"

"I think so."

The woman shook her head.

"Apparently wearing almost nothing is considered acting now."

Scarlett chuckled softly.

"I wouldn't know."

"I don't think anyone does."

She turned another page.

The workshop fell quiet again.

Scarlett carefully trimmed the new sole before pressing it perfectly into place.

Another page turned.

Then another.

Suddenly Mrs. Parker stopped.

"...Oh."

Scarlett looked up.

"What is it?"

The woman's expression had changed completely.

"Poor Bellamy family."

Scarlett searched her memory.

"The investment company?"

"I believe so."

She adjusted her glasses and read aloud.

"Richard Bellamy, founder of Bellamy Investments, has died following a diving accident during a private voyage aboard the family's one-hundred-and-fifteen-metre yacht."

She paused for a moment before continuing.

"He leaves behind his wife, Eleanor Bellamy, and the couple's one-year-old daughter, Bianca."

The workshop seemed strangely quiet.

Even Scarlett stopped working for a moment.

Mrs. Parker continued reading.

"Mrs. Bellamy has announced that she will assume leadership of Bellamy Investments and continue managing the family business."

She slowly closed the magazine.

Mrs. Parker folded the magazine carefully.

"I can't imagine losing your husband..."

"...and having to run an investment company the next day."

Scarlett continued working.

I can.

Mrs. Parker remained quiet for a moment.

"You know..."

"I've heard good things about Mrs. Bellamy."

Scarlett looked up.

"Oh?"

"They say she is one of the few in the investment business with her heart in the right place."

"A scholarship here."

"A charity dinner there."

She smiled.

"People speak well of her. I've read about her before."

She slipped the magazine back onto the table.

Scarlett smiled politely and returned to her work.

Half an hour later she carried the finished pumps to the counter.

Mrs. Parker slipped one on.

Then the other.

She took a few careful steps.

"Perfect."

Scarlett smiled.

"I'm glad."

After Mrs. Parker had left, the little bell above the door rang once more before settling into silence.

Scarlett locked the door.

Evening belonged to Scarlett Heels.

She opened the familiar notebook.

Many names had already been crossed out.

For a long moment she simply looked at the remaining blank space.

Then she picked up her pen.

Slowly...

carefully...

she wrote another name.

Bellamy Investments

She closed the notebook.

Tomorrow there would be more repairs.

Another pair of heels to finish.

And perhaps...

one day...

another door would open.

Chapter 4 - Capacity

The workshop had become quieter.

Not because there were fewer customers.

Because there were fewer repairs.

Scarlett stood at the workbench, carefully polishing the deep ruby leather of a finished pair of heels.

A gentle knock sounded at the open door.

An elderly gentleman stepped inside carrying a pair of worn leather shoes.

"Good morning, Scarlett."

Scarlett smiled.

"Good morning, Mr. Edwards."

He placed the shoes on the counter.

"I was hoping..."

"...perhaps one last time?"

Scarlett looked down at them.

She remembered them immediately.

Scarlett smiled warmly.

"Leave them with me."

His face brightened.

After he had gone, Scarlett placed the shoes carefully on a shelf of their own.

Some customers had earned that privilege.

The rest of the morning belonged to Scarlett Heels.

Measurements.

Patterns.

Leather.

The steady rhythm of knife, hammer and thread.

Shortly before lunch the telephone rang.

"Scarlett Heels."

"Good morning, Scarlett."

"Mrs. Parker."

"I hope I'm not disturbing you."

"Never."

Mrs. Parker laughed.

"I'd finally like that pair we talked about."

Scarlett reached for the appointment book.

She turned one page.

Then another.

Her smile slowly faded.

"I'm afraid..."

"...the earliest fitting I can offer is September."

A short silence.

"I'm sorry."

Mrs. Parker laughed again.

"My dear..."

"I've waited years to find someone who makes shoes that actually fit."

"I can wait another few months."

Scarlett nodded.

"Thank you."

"By the way..."

"I've recommended you to all my friends."

"...I hope they'll make you even busier."

Both women laughed.

After she had hung up, she remained seated for a long moment.

The workshop was exactly as she had imagined it.

Busy.

Alive.

Filled with beautiful shoes.

And still...

Women were waiting.

Not because the shoes were difficult to sell.

Because there was only one Scarlett.

She opened the familiar folder.

The business plan had changed countless times over the past months.

New calculations.

New suppliers.

Manufacturing notes.

Margins filled with handwritten corrections.

The vision itself had never changed.

Only the path towards it had become clearer.

Scarlett closed the folder.

Then her eyes wandered towards the small notebook lying beside it.

She opened it.

Names.

Appointments.

Investors.

Some crossed out.

Some still waiting.

One entry made her pause.

Bellamy Investments

Mrs. Parker.

The magazine.

She smiled to herself.

She switched on the computer.

For a while the screen remained blank.

Then she began to write.

She introduced herself.

Explained Scarlett Heels.

Attached her business plan.

She read the email once.

Changed a single sentence.

Then pressed Send.

That was all.

There was another pair of heels waiting beneath the work lamp.

Three days later...

Scarlett unlocked the workshop as she did every morning.

She hung her jacket beside the door.

Switched on the lights.

Then the computer.

While the kettle quietly heated water for tea, she opened her inbox.

One new message caught her eyes immediately.

Bellamy Investments

Scarlett opened it.

Dear Miss Corvina,

Thank you for your email and for the opportunity to review your proposal.

Mrs. Eleanor Bellamy would be pleased to meet with you personally.

Would Thursday at 10:00 a.m. be convenient?

Kind regards,

Bellamy Investments

Scarlett read the message a second time.

Then opened her appointment book.

Between a fitting...

and a collection...

she wrote one more appointment.

Thursday – 10:00 Bellamy Investments

She closed the book.

The kettle began to whistle.

Scarlett smiled.

Then reached for the first shoe of the day.

Chapter 5 - Bellamy Investments

Thursday arrived sooner than Scarlett had expected.

She unlocked the workshop just after sunrise.

The familiar scent of leather welcomed her.

For a while, it was an ordinary morning.

She finished a pair of pumps that had rested on the workbench overnight.

Wrapped them carefully.

Prepared two appointments for the afternoon.

Only then did she glance at the clock.

Nine o'clock.

Scarlett removed her work apron.

She slipped into the ruby-red blazer she reserved for business meetings.

On the corner of the workbench lay her business plan.

Beside it rested a small leather suitcase.

Inside carefully arranged lay several prototypes.

She checked the contents one final time.

Closed the case.

Locked the workshop.

Bellamy Investments occupied the upper floors of a modern office building overlooking the city.

Scarlett arrived ten minutes early.

She always did.

The receptionist smiled politely.

"Good morning."

"Good morning Miss Corvina."

"I have an appointment with Mrs. Bellamy."

"Of course, Miss Corvina."

"Mrs. Bellamy is expecting you."

"If you'd like to take a seat, she'll be with you shortly."

Scarlett thanked her and sat down.

Employees crossed the reception area carrying folders and laptops.

Telephones rang somewhere in the distance.

Scarlett had seen offices like this before.

Investment firms had a habit of looking remarkably alike.

Only the names beside the entrance changed.

She glanced briefly at her watch.

Still five minutes.

Precisely at ten o'clock a door opened.

A woman stepped into the reception area.

She wore a dark blue business suit with understated elegance.

Her expression was calm.

Warm.

Confident.

She smiled.

"Miss Corvina?"

Scarlett stood.

"Mrs. Bellamy."

They shook hands.

"Thank you for coming."

"Thank you for inviting me."

Mrs. Bellamy glanced towards the small suitcase.

"I hope you didn't bring your entire collection."

Scarlett smiled.

"Only a few examples."

"Good."

"I always prefer seeing craftsmanship rather than photographs."

She gestured towards the corridor.

"Shall we?"

They walked side by side.

The conversation remained pleasantly light.

"Did you find us easily?"

"Very."

"I'm glad."

Mrs. Bellamy turned toward Scarlett for a brief moment.

"You've been presenting your business plan for some time, haven't you?"

Scarlett nodded.

"I have."

Mrs. Bellamy didn't ask how many times.

She simply smiled.

"I imagine you've become rather good at it."

Scarlett returned the smile.

"I've had plenty of practice."

Mrs. Bellamy laughed softly.

"I suppose that's one way of looking at it."

They reached a pair of oak doors.

Mrs. Bellamy opened one of them.

Three gentlemen were already seated around the large conference table.

Each rose as Scarlett entered.

Mrs. Bellamy made the introductions.

"Miss Corvina..."

"...these are my senior investment consultants."

Handshakes were exchanged.

Business cards followed.

Scarlett placed her business plan neatly on the table.

Mrs. Bellamy took her seat at the head of the table.

She looked around the room.

Then her eyes came to rest on Scarlett.

A welcoming smile crossed her face.

"Miss Corvina..."

"...would you tell us about Scarlett Heels?"

Chapter 6 - Closed

A sleek silver sports car rolled slowly to a stop in front of the little workshop.

The driver removed her sunglasses and looked up at the modest sign.

Scarlett Heels

"So this is the place."

Jennifer stepped onto the pavement.

She had heard the name more than once over the past months.

Designers.

Stylists.

Models.

Someone always seemed to mention Scarlett Heels.

Curiosity had finally won.

She tried the door.

Locked.

Jennifer frowned.

She checked her watch.

Half past ten.

"Seriously?"

She knocked gently.

Nothing.

She sighed.

"Just my luck."

"Looking for Scarlett?"

Jennifer turned.

A woman carrying two shopping bags smiled at her.

"I am."

Mrs. Parker stopped beside her.

"I'm afraid you've chosen the one morning she isn't here."

Jennifer smiled.

"That figures."

Mrs. Parker looked at her for a moment.

Then another.

Her eyes widened.

"...Jennifer?"

Jennifer smiled.

"Guilty."

Mrs. Parker felt suddenly embarrassed.

Only a few months ago she had sat in Scarlett's workshop complaining about this Jennifer who seemed to appear in every magazine wearing less clothing than the last time.

Now she stood right in front of her.

Jennifer noticed the expression and laughed softly.

"I promise..."

"I'm much less interesting in real life."

Mrs. Parker couldn't help laughing too.

"I suppose magazines aren't always fair."

"They usually aren't."

The awkwardness disappeared instantly.

Jennifer looked once more at the locked workshop.

"I've been trying to find time to come here for weeks."

"I finally managed..."

"...and she's closed."

Mrs. Parker smiled knowingly.

"Scarlett almost never closes during the week."

"So something important must have happened."

Jennifer nodded.

"I'll just have to try again."

As she turned to leave, something caught her eye.

Mrs. Parker's shoes.

She stopped.

"...May I?"

Mrs. Parker looked down.

"My shoes?"

Jennifer nodded.

"They're beautiful."

Mrs. Parker's entire face lit up.

"Oh!"

"They're Scarlett's."

She instinctively placed one foot slightly forward.

Jennifer bent down for a closer look.

She studied the elegant lines.

The leather.

The stitching.

The proportions.

"These are extraordinary."

Mrs. Parker positively beamed.

"I know."

Jennifer looked up.

"How long did you wait?"

"Three months."

Jennifer blinked.

"Three months?"

"Worth every single day."

Jennifer smiled.

"I believe you."

She stood again.

"No wonder everyone keeps talking about Scarlett."

Mrs. Parker laughed.

"I've recommended her to every woman in my bridge club."

Jennifer grinned.

"So it's your fault."

"I plead guilty."

Both women laughed.

Jennifer reached into her handbag.

She took out a business card.

Turned it over.

Wrote a mobile number on the back.

Then handed it to Mrs. Parker.

"Would you do me a favour?"

"Of course."

"If you happen to see Scarlett before I do..."

"...would you give her this?"

Mrs. Parker accepted the card carefully.

"I certainly will."

Jennifer smiled warmly.

"Thank you."

She put her sunglasses back on.

"Well..."

"I suppose beautiful shoes are worth waiting for."

With a small wave she returned to her car.

Mrs. Parker watched the silver sports car disappear around the corner.

Then she slowly looked down at the business card in her hand.

She turned it over once.

Then again.

A broad smile spread across her face.

She whispered to herself,

"Jennifer..."

"...gave **me** her number."

She laughed all the way home.

Her bridge club...

would never hear the end of this story.

Chapter 7 - The Vision

Scarlett took a quiet breath.

Then she began.

She spoke neither quickly nor dramatically.

She simply described the company she wanted to build.

Not a factory.

Not another shoe brand.

A different way of creating luxury footwear.

One customer at a time.

One perfectly fitted pair at a time.

She spoke about her little workshop.

About the waiting list.

About women returning because, for the first time, shoes had been made specifically for their feet.

One consultant leaned forward.

"You measure every customer personally?"

"I do."

"How long does that take?"

"About an hour."

He made a brief note.

"And you consider that scalable?"

Scarlett shook her head.

"No."

She opened another page of her business plan.

"That's why I want to replace it."

The consultants looked up.

Scarlett pointed towards a simple sketch.

"A Tailor Lounge."

The drawing was little more than a room.

A customer standing on a platform.

Several notes surrounded it.

"The measurements should one day be taken automatically."

Another consultant frowned.

"With what technology?"

"I don't know yet."

Scarlett smiled faintly.

"I'm a shoemaker."

"Not an engineer."

"But I know what the technology must accomplish."

The consultant nodded.

Mrs. Bellamy remained silent.

Scarlett continued.

"I don't want customers to spend an hour being measured."

"I want them to spend that hour choosing the shoes they'll love."

Another page.

A boutique.

Not rows of shelves.

Not stacks of boxes.

Comfortable seating.

Private consultation.

Elegant displays.

One consultant studied the drawing.

"So..."

"...a luxury shoe shop."

Scarlett shook her head.

"No."

Silence.

"A boutique."

"A place where every visit feels personal."

"The shoes won't simply be purchased."

"They'll be collected."

The consultant looked puzzled.

"Collected?"

Scarlett nodded.

"They've been made especially for one woman."

"I think receiving them should feel like a celebration."

Mrs. Bellamy made another small note.

The next page.

Manufacturing.

One consultant looked up.

"I don't see a factory."

"There isn't one."

"You don't intend to build one?"

"No."

Scarlett folded her hands.

"There are already remarkable shoemakers."

"Many small workshops."

"Family businesses."

"Generations of experience."

"I don't want to replace them."

"I want to work with them."

"They know how to make beautiful shoes."

"I know how to bring them together."

For the first time all three consultants remained silent for a moment.

Then the eldest slowly closed the business plan.

"Miss Corvina..."

"Your craftsmanship is exceptional."

"And your vision is certainly ambitious."

He glanced briefly towards his colleagues.

"But we don't believe it is investable."

Scarlett listened quietly.

She had heard similar words before.

"The Tailor Lounge depends on technology that doesn't yet exist."

"The boutique concept is entirely unproven."

"You'll have no direct control over manufacturing."

"And every part of the company still depends on you personally."

Another consultant nodded.

"The financial projections concern us as well."

He tapped one page.

"If your calculations are correct..."

"...a pair of shoes like these would sell for..."

He looked again.

"...one..."

"...perhaps even two thousand dollars."

He leaned back.

A courteous smile crossed his face.

"No man would ever spend that kind of money on a pair of shoes."

Silence.

Scarlett said nothing.

Mrs. Bellamy looked across the table.

Scarlett met her eyes.

For the briefest moment...

the faintest hint of a smile passed between them.

Neither consultant noticed.

The discussion continued.

Mrs. Bellamy remained quiet.

As the meeting drew to a close, her eyes wandered almost absent-mindedly towards the little leather suitcase standing beside Scarlett's chair.

It stood open.

Inside rested several prototypes.

Mrs. Bellamy reached for one of them.

She turned the elegant shoe slowly in her hands.

The leather.

The stitching.

The balance.

Beautiful.

She looked up.

"Do you happen to have a pair my size?"

Scarlett took one brief look at her feet.

She reached into the case.

Selected a pair.

And handed it to her.

Mrs. Bellamy slipped one shoe on.

She stood.

Walked slowly across the room.

Then smiled.

"They fit like a glove."

Scarlett shook her head.

"No."

Mrs. Bellamy looked at her.

Scarlett gently touched the leather across the forefoot.

"Too wide."

For a moment...

the room became completely silent.

Mrs. Bellamy looked down at the shoe.

Then back at Scarlett.

A thoughtful smile appeared on her face.

Then almost apologetically:

"I have a charity dinner next Thursday."

"Would you terribly mind if I borrowed them?"

Scarlett blinked in surprise.

"Of course not."

Mrs. Bellamy laughed.

"I promise I'll look after them."

Scarlett closed the suitcase.

Then she said naturally:

"I'll come by next week and collect them."

Mrs. Bellamy nodded.

"Please do."

Scarlett gathered her papers.

Closed the little leather suitcase.

Shook hands around the table.

Then quietly left the room.

The door closed behind her.

Rejection number fifty-two.

But maybe a new customer after all.

Chapter 8 - Believe

One week later Scarlett returned to Bellamy Investments.

She smiled at the receptionist.

"I've come to collect my shoes."

"Mrs. Bellamy is expecting you."

Mrs. Bellamy greeted her personally.

The shoes stood on her desk.

Scarlett smiled.

"I hope they behaved."

Mrs. Bellamy laughed.

"Miss Corvina..."

"I owe you an apology."

Scarlett looked puzzled.

"I intended to borrow them for one evening."

A brief pause.

"I wore them every day."

Scarlett couldn't help smiling.

"They're still two millimetres too wide."

"I know."

Mrs. Bellamy looked at the shoes.

"I never noticed."

Both women laughed.

Mrs. Bellamy gently touched the leather.

"I've become rather fond of them."

She hesitated.

"May I buy them?"

Scarlett blinked.

"They're prototypes."

"I know."

"They're not perfect."

"I know."

"They're still two millimetres too wide."

Mrs. Bellamy smiled.

Scarlett nodded.

"I'd be honoured."

Mrs. Bellamy placed the shoes carefully beside her desk.

Then her expression became more thoughtful.

"There is one more thing I'd like to tell you."

She picked up Scarlett's business plan.

It was covered in notes.

Folded pages.

Pencil marks.

She laid it gently on the desk.

"I've read it three times."

Scarlett waited.

Mrs. Bellamy looked at her.

"It's a terrible business plan."

Silence.

Scarlett felt the familiar disappointment settle in.

Mrs. Bellamy continued calmly.

"It has no management structure."

"No realistic timeline."

"No technology."

"No manufacturing network."

"Frankly..."

"...it's a disaster."

Scarlett lowered her eyes.

Mrs. Bellamy smiled.

"Fortunately..."

"...it's exactly the business plan I expected from a nineteen-year-old master shoemaker."

Scarlett looked up.

"My consultants rejected this plan."

"They were right."

"I rejected it too."

The room became very quiet.

Mrs. Bellamy rested one hand on the folder.

"Business plans can be rewritten."

"This one will be."

"Again."

"And again."

"As your company grows."

She looked directly at Scarlett.

"But people..."

"...can't be rewritten."

A long silence.

"They looked at your business plan."

"They looked at your age."

"I looked at you."

Scarlett said nothing.

"Do you know what convinced me?"

She slowly shook her head.

"It wasn't your shoes."

"It wasn't your projections."

"It wasn't your numbers."

Another pause.

"It was three simple words."

Scarlett frowned.

Mrs. Bellamy smiled.

"I don't know."

"You didn't pretend."

"You didn't bluff."

"You knew exactly what had to exist."

"You simply admitted you didn't yet know how to build it."

Mrs. Bellamy leaned back.

"I've spent thirty years listening to entrepreneurs who claimed to have every answer."

A gentle smile.

"I've never trusted one of them."

Scarlett smiled faintly.

Mrs. Bellamy continued.

"Your Tailor Lounge doesn't exist."

"The software doesn't exist."

"The boutiques don't exist."

"The company doesn't exist."

She closed the folder once more.

"But you do."

Scarlett felt her throat tighten.

Mrs. Bellamy's voice softened.

"I don't invest in business plans."

She pushed the folder aside.

"If I did..."

"...this one would already be in the wastebasket."

Scarlett almost smiled.

Mrs. Bellamy looked directly into her eyes.

"I invest in people."

A pause.

"Miss Corvina..."

"I believe you."

Another pause.

"And I believe in you."

Scarlett stared at her.

Unable to speak.

Mrs. Bellamy smiled warmly.

"I'd like Bellamy Investments to invest in Scarlett Heels."

Nothing.

Scarlett simply looked at her.

Fifty-two meetings.

Fifty-one rejections.

She had imagined this sentence so many times...

...that hearing it felt almost unreal.

Mrs. Bellamy laughed softly.

"I seem to have rendered you speechless."

Scarlett swallowed.

For a moment she looked down at the worn leather suitcase that had accompanied her to every investor's office.

Then back at Mrs. Bellamy.

Her voice was barely above a whisper.

"You really mean it."

Mrs. Bellamy nodded.

"I do."

The first tear escaped before Scarlett even noticed it.

She smiled through it.

"So..."

"...my dream isn't impossible after all."

Mrs. Bellamy slowly shook her head.

"It never was."

She opened a drawer.

Removed a single sheet of paper.

Not a contract.

A handwritten list.

An architect.

An interior designer.

A software company.

A lawyer.

She slid it across the desk.

"Tomorrow morning..."

"...your business plan starts becoming a company."

Scarlett looked down at the names.

Real people.

Real companies.

Real beginnings.

Mrs. Bellamy stood and extended her hand.

"Shall we build Scarlett Heels together?"

Scarlett rose.

She took her hand.

This time...

without hesitation.

"Let's build Scarlett Heels."

Chapter 9 - Building Scarlett Heels

The investment solved only one problem.

Money.

Everything else still had to be built.

Scarlett worked fourteen hours a day.

Seven days a week.

For the next three years.

Mrs. Bellamy opened doors.

Scarlett walked through them.

Architects.

Lawyers.

Interior designers.

A young software company.

None of them knew much about shoes.

Scarlett did.

She learned about contracts.

They learned about heels.

Master shoemakers joined Scarlett Heels.

Small workshops.

Family businesses.

Craftsmen whose work Scarlett trusted.

Manufacturing was no longer the problem.

Every finished pair still passed through Scarlett's hands.

Not to be made.

To be approved.

The company quietly grew around the workshop.

Two rented rooms upstairs became the first headquarters of Scarlett Heels.

Accounting.

Customer relations.

Supplier coordination.

The telephone rang more often than Scarlett's hammer.

Customers still came to the workshop.

Not all of them sat down in front of Scarlett any more.

She trained others to take measurements.

To listen.

To observe.

To record.

The workshop itself had become the bottleneck.

The Tailor Lounge was the solution...

...but not yet ready.

Meanwhile...

the first boutique took shape.

Elegant.

Quiet.

Private.

Everything exactly as Scarlett had imagined.

At its heart...

the Tailor Lounge.

Still empty.

Still waiting.

Opening planned: May 2008.

The software wasn't ready.

It measured.

Scarlett measured.

The results differed.

"Again."

The programmers rewrote.

Scarlett compared.

"Again."

The boutique was finished.

The Tailor Lounge wasn't.

The opening moved.

November 2008.

The rent had to be paid.

The staff had been hired.

The lights worked.

The doors remained closed.

Every month cost money.

Every month tested patience.

Mrs. Bellamy laid another progress report on her desk.

She turned toward Scarlett.

"Do we abort?"

The room fell silent.

Mrs. Bellamy folded her hands.

"We've delayed the opening twice."

"The boutiques are ready."

"The supplier network is ready."

"The company is ready."

She looked towards another software report.

"The software isn't."

A brief pause.

"Even my patience has its limits."

Scarlett nodded.

"I know."

Silence.

Then she quietly said,

"No. Please don't abort."

Mrs. Bellamy waited.

"The software will never be finished."

"It will only become better."

"If we wait for perfection..."

"...we'll never open."

Mrs. Bellamy studied her for a long moment.

Then she slowly nodded.

"Very well."

"One last delay."

Scarlett returned to work.

Fourteen hours.

Every day.

The software improved.

Every month.

Every measurement became a little better.

Never perfect.

Always better.

Early in 2009...

Jennifer received her Scarlett Heels.

She wore them.

Photographers noticed.

Fashion magazines asked.

One article became three.

Three became ten.

The telephone barely stopped ringing.

The waiting list exploded.

Appointments disappeared months into the future.

The waiting list reached three months going on four.

And kept growing.

Scarlett walked into the project office carrying the latest software report.

Still slower than she wanted.

Still unfinished.

She placed it on the table.

Then looked around the room.

"We open in May."

The lead programmer frowned.

"It still isn't perfect."

Scarlett nodded.

"It is slower than desired, but faster than doing it manually."

"We will continue to improve it."

"We have no choice. We have to open shop."

The evening before the opening...

Scarlett stood alone inside the first Scarlett Heels boutique.

Four years earlier...

it had been a sketch inside a terrible business plan.

Now the sketch surrounded her.

The displays.

The quiet elegance.

The Tailor Lounge.

She slowly walked through the empty boutique.

Ran one hand across the scanner.

It was still slower than she wanted.

Still unfinished.

She smiled.

"It would always be unfinished."

She switched off the lights.

Locked the door.

Tomorrow...

Scarlett Heels would finally open.

Chapter 10 - Opening Day

The boutique was already alive long before the doors opened.

Staff moved between the displays.

Champagne glasses were arranged.

Flowers received their final adjustments.

The software team stood gathered around the Tailor Lounge.

The architects looked around with quiet satisfaction.

The interior designer smiled every time someone admired a detail she had chosen.

Upstairs...

the new offices answered their first telephone calls.

Scarlett walked through the boutique without saying much.

She straightened a shoe by a fraction.

Moved a chair a few centimetres.

Smoothed a ribbon that didn't need smoothing.

Mrs. Bellamy watched with an amused smile.

"You know..."

"...nobody but you would ever notice."

Scarlett looked at the display once more.

"I know."

She moved it anyway.

A gentle knock sounded at the rear entrance.

Mrs. Parker entered.

She looked around.

Then simply stood there.

"Oh..."

She slowly turned in a circle.

"It really happened."

Scarlett smiled.

"It did."

Mrs. Parker hugged her without asking permission.

"I always knew it would."

Outside...

a small crowd had already gathered.

Some had appointments.

Others were simply curious.

A photographer adjusted his camera.

Someone handed champagne to the waiting guests.

The ribbon stretched quietly across the entrance.

Mrs. Bellamy joined Scarlett beside the door.

"Ready?"

Scarlett looked through the glass.

Women were already studying the displays.

Even before the doors had opened.

She smiled.

"Yes."

Mrs. Bellamy handed her the scissors.

"No."

She smiled warmly.

"You've earned this."

Scarlett cut the ribbon.

Applause filled the street.

The doors opened.

Scarlett Heels welcomed its first customers.

Within minutes the boutique filled with conversation.

Women wandered slowly between the displays.

Not shelves.

Not boxes.

Each model stood on its own pedestal.

Like a small work of art.

Some admired the elegant black Nocturne.

"This feels more like an art vernissage than a shoe shop."

Others paused in front of Grace.

Several simply walked around the displays twice before making a decision.

Exactly as Scarlett had hoped.

The first customer entered the Tailor Lounge.

The software team instinctively held their breath.

The scan began.

Scarlett watched the screen.

Still a little slower than she wanted.

The result appeared.

Scarlett studied it.

Then quietly nodded.

"Good."

A programmer finally exhaled.

His colleagues laughed.

Months of work...

approved with one word.

Appointments followed one after another.

Orders were entered.

Measurements confirmed.

Customer files appeared upstairs.

Telephones began ringing.

The company had started working.

Not tomorrow.

Today.

Shortly before noon another familiar face entered.

Scarlett recognised her immediately.

"Mrs. Collins."

The woman smiled.

"I believe..."

"...you told me to come here today."

"I did."

Scarlett disappeared briefly into the back room.

She returned carrying a deep ruby-red box.

The conversation around them seemed to soften.

Not because anyone had announced anything.

People simply noticed.

Scarlett placed the box onto the table.

She smiled.

"Mrs. Collins..."

"...welcome to your Collection."

The woman slowly opened the box.

Inside rested the shoes Scarlett had designed months earlier in the little workshop.

She lifted one carefully.

Put it on.

Then the other.

She stood.

Walked a few steps.

Stopped.

A smile spread across her face.

"I've never owned shoes that felt like they belonged to me."

Scarlett smiled.

"They always did."

Mrs. Bellamy had watched the entire moment without saying a word.

She stepped beside Scarlett.

"So that's why."

Scarlett looked at her.

"The Collection."

Scarlett nodded.

"They're not buying shoes."

"They're taking home something that was made just for them."

Mrs. Bellamy smiled.

"I understand now."

The afternoon passed almost unnoticed.

Champagne glasses emptied.

Order books filled.

The Tailor Lounge never stood idle.

Upstairs...

telephones continued ringing.

Supplier orders were already being prepared.

The company had begun exactly as Scarlett had imagined.

Busy.

Elegant.

Personal.

Mrs. Parker accepted another glass of champagne.

She proudly told anyone willing to listen,

"I've known Scarlett since she repaired Italian shoes in that little workshop."

Nobody doubted her.

For one brief moment Scarlett stood still.
The displays.
The conversations.
The laughter.
The Tailor Lounge.
Mrs. Bellamy talking to the software team.
Customers already planning their next visit.
Four years.
Fifty-two meetings.
One terrible business plan.
She smiled.
Then someone called across the boutique.
"Miss Corvina?"
Scarlett turned.
"Coming."
And with that...
the first ordinary day of Scarlett Heels had begun.

Chapter 11 - Growth

The first boutique had proven one thing.

Scarlett Heels worked.

Six weeks later...

the second boutique opened.

Another month later...

the third.

London.

Paris.

Milan.

Then New York.

Tokyo.

Singapore.

Every boutique looked unmistakably like Scarlett Heels.

Every city added a little of its own character.

The supplier network kept growing.

Master shoemakers.

Small family workshops.

Generations of craftsmanship.

Scarlett Heels never built a factory.

It built a family.
The software improved.
Every month.
Every update measured a little faster.
A little more accurately.
Never perfectly.
Always better.
Customers no longer travelled to Scarlett.
Scarlett Heels travelled to them.
The newspapers called it a luxury brand.
Scarlett disagreed.
"We make shoes."
Every new boutique filled within weeks.
Every new city produced another waiting list.
Eight weeks.
Always eight weeks.
Whenever capacity increased...
demand grew faster.
The Tailor Lounge had become the heart of every boutique.
Not because it replaced people.
Because it gave every fitter Scarlett's experience.
Millions of measurements slowly became something else.
Knowledge.
The small offices above the workshop disappeared.
Customer Relations moved into its own building.
Accounting followed.

Supplier Management needed another floor.

Software development occupied an entire wing.

The old workshop remained exactly where it had always been.

Scarlett refused to move it.

By 2013...

Scarlett Heels had crossed continents.

The maps in the headquarters slowly filled with tiny ruby-red pins.

Another boutique.

Another city.

Another country.

Another dream becoming ordinary.

Only one thing refused to grow as quickly.

Tailoring.

Not the measurements.

The understanding behind them.

The software learned every day.

So did the fitters.

Demand learned faster.

The waiting list remained.

Eight weeks.

Always.

Chapter 12 - The Breakthrough

The applause lasted much longer than Violet had expected.

When the final slide disappeared from the large conference screen, the representatives of the client stood up one after another. Hands were shaken. Smiles filled the room. Someone joked that they had finally found a system that understood their business better than some of their own managers.

Violet laughed.

For months, her small team had worked almost around the clock. Thousands of hours of programming, testing, retraining models, discovering mistakes, correcting them, and starting over.

Now it worked.

The customer's first large-scale Deep Learning project had exceeded every expectation.

As the visitors left the conference room, the sales director hurried after them.

"We'll call you next week to discuss the rollout!"

The finance manager was already calculating future revenue.

"Our reputation is going to explode after this."

Everyone was talking at once.

Only Violet slipped out of the room.

She crossed the hallway, ignored the executive offices and opened the glass door leading to the engineering department.

The atmosphere was completely different.

Someone had ordered pizza.

Coffee mugs covered every desk.

Three developers were still staring at graphs on a large monitor, unable to believe the numbers.

One of them looked up.

"They accepted it."

Violet smiled.

"I know."

"It actually works."

She walked over to the screen.

"It always worked."

The engineer laughed.

"No... I mean in the real world."

Nobody spoke.

They simply watched the incoming data.

Predictions.

Classifications.

Confidence values.

Everything behaved exactly as they had hoped.

One of the younger developers leaned back in his chair.

"So..."

"...what do we do now?"

Violet looked around the room.

At the tired faces.

The empty coffee cups.

The whiteboards covered with formulas and sketches.

She smiled.

"First..."

"...we celebrate."

A bottle of champagne appeared from somewhere.

Plastic cups replaced elegant glasses.

Nobody cared.

The sales team would probably celebrate in an expensive restaurant that evening.

Violet had no intention of joining them.

This was where she belonged.

Among the people who had built something together.

Someone raised a cup.

"To the first successful deployment!"

Everyone cheered.

Another engineer grinned.

She looked once more at the running system.

The prediction graph updated itself again.

Then she smiled with the excitement of someone who could already see the next challenge.

"No."

Everyone looked at her.

"This..."

She pointed at the screen.

"...is just Version One."

For a second the room was silent.

Then laughter erupted.

One developer grabbed a marker and walked to the whiteboard.

"All right."

"Version Two."

Within minutes, fresh ideas covered the board.

Nobody mentioned revenue.

Nobody talked about market share.

Nobody cared how much the company had just become worth.

They were engineers.

They had solved one impossible problem.

Now they were looking for the next one.

And Violet had never been happier.

Chapter 13 - Momentum

Three months had passed since the successful deployment.

Clairmont Technologies was changing almost weekly.

Every Monday another desk seemed to appear.

Every Tuesday another customer called.

Every Friday someone had to find room for another whiteboard.

The company occupied an entire floor in a modern downtown office building.

It wasn't luxurious.

It wasn't designed to impress investors.

It simply had enough space for talented people to build remarkable software.

Violet preferred it that way.

She stepped out of the elevator carrying a cardboard box.

Inside were six brand-new keyboards.

"Morning!"

A chorus of voices answered.

"Morning, Violet!"

She smiled.

The office was already alive.

Somebody was discussing neural network architectures near the coffee machine.

Two developers argued over a graph displayed on a large monitor.

Another engineer was drawing boxes and arrows across an already overcrowded whiteboard.

Violet put down the box.

"I see we're running out of wall again."

"We've been out of wall since yesterday," one developer replied.

Laughter filled the room.

She handed out the keyboards one by one.

"Try not to wear these out before Christmas."

"No promises."

As she reached her own desk, a voice called from the other side of the office.

"Violet?"

She looked up.

"Got a minute?"

"Always."

A young developer pointed at his screen.

"I think my training data is biased, but I can't figure out why."

Violet pulled up a chair beside him.

For the next half hour they completely forgot the time.

She asked questions.

Not because she already knew the answer.

Because she wanted him to discover it himself.

"What happens if you remove this feature?"

He tried it.

"No change."

"And this one?"

Again.

"No change."

Violet leaned back.

"So..."

"...which features actually matter?"

The developer stared at the monitor.

Then his eyes widened.

"Oh..."

He quickly changed the dataset.

The model began training again.

A few moments later the first results appeared.

Accuracy climbed.

Then climbed again.

The young engineer turned toward Violet with a grin.

"That's it!"

She smiled just as broadly.

"No."

He looked puzzled.

"That's the beginning."

Before he could answer, her phone rang.

She glanced at the display.

Reception.

"Violet?"

"There's a delegation from Fisher Logistics here for the ten o'clock presentation."

She looked at the clock.

Ten o'clock already.

"I'll be right there."

She stood up.

"Good luck."

"You won't stay?"

She smiled apologetically.

"I have to pretend to be a CEO for an hour."

The office burst into laughter.

As she walked toward the meeting room, she glanced back once.

The developers were already arguing enthusiastically over the improved results.

Chapter 14 - The Workshop

Nowadays Scarlett spent most of her days in meetings.

Budgets.

Architects.

Software.

New boutiques.

New countries.

New ideas.

Beautiful work.

Necessary work.

But not the work that had first made her fall in love with shoes.

Every now and then...

without telling anyone...

she disappeared.

At headquarters people had stopped asking where she had gone.

Someone would simply smile.

"The workshop."

Nothing had changed.

The old sign still hung above the door.

The familiar smell of leather greeted her before she even switched on the lights.

Her workbench waited exactly where it always had.

Scarlett put on the same old leather apron.

It still fitted.

A gentle knock.

The door opened.

Mrs. Parker smiled.

"I had a feeling."

Scarlett laughed.

"You usually do."

Mrs. Parker placed an old pair of Italian shoes onto the bench.

Scarlett examined them.

"I repaired these last year."

"I know."

"And the year before."

"I know."

Scarlett looked up.

"You could buy a new pair."

Mrs. Parker smiled.

"I could."

A pause.

"But then I'd miss seeing you."

Both women laughed.

Scarlett picked up the shoe.
The leather had aged beautifully.
She polished it.
Restitched one seam.
Replaced the worn heel tip.
Tiny jobs.
Unimportant jobs.
Wonderful jobs.
Neither woman hurried.
Mrs. Parker talked about the bridge club.
About neighbours.
About absolutely nothing of consequence.
Scarlett listened.
Mostly smiled.
Occasionally laughed.

On leaving Mrs. Parker paused at the door.
She looked back at Scarlett.
"You know..."
"...you always seem happier when I find you here."
Scarlett looked around the little workshop.
She smiled.
"So do I."
Mrs. Parker nodded.
"I'll bring the other Italian pair next month."

Scarlett laughed.

"I know."

The little bell above the door rang softly.

Scarlett remained where she was.

She rested one hand on the old workbench.

Outside...

Scarlett Heels was opening another boutique somewhere in the world.

Inside...

everything was exactly as it had always been.

And that was precisely why she kept coming back.

Chapter 15 - The Offer

As Violet walked toward the meeting room, she glanced back once. The developers were already arguing enthusiastically over the improved results.

The meeting lasted less than forty minutes.

It wasn't about software.

It wasn't about engineering.

It wasn't even about customers.

One of the board members slid a folder across the table.

"A larger technology company has approached us."

Violet opened the folder.

Inside was a formal acquisition proposal.

\$6,000,000.

Silence filled the room.

Finally someone smiled.

"Congratulations."

Another added,

"This is an extraordinary offer."

Violet looked at the number for a few seconds.

Then she closed the folder.

"It's just money."

The room fell silent.

She pushed the proposal back across the table.

"Please thank them for their interest."

"But the answer is no."

Without another word, she stood up and left.

As she returned to the engineering department, she could already hear an animated discussion long before she reached the door.

Someone had filled yet another whiteboard.

A developer spotted her.

"Violet! We think we've found something!"

She smiled.

"I was hoping you'd say that."

This...

This was still the best job in the world.

Chapter 16 - Spotting

The boardroom looked exactly as it had the last time.

The same polished table.

The same presentation screen.

The same familiar faces.

Only the folder lying in front of Violet was different.

"This offer comes from Arcturus Systems."

The chairman smiled.

"They've been following Clairmont Technologies for over a year."

He slid the folder toward her.

"They're prepared to offer..."

He paused for effect.

"...fifteen million dollars."

The room remained silent.

Everyone looked at Violet.

Two years earlier, she had barely looked at the acquisition proposal before declining it.

Nobody expected a different answer this time.

Violet opened the folder.

She read the first page.

Then the second.

Finally she closed it again.

Nobody spoke.

The chairman smiled.

"So..."

"...shall I tell them no?"

Violet looked down at the folder.

For a long moment she said nothing.

Then she answered quietly.

"No..."

The chairman nodded.

"I thought so."

"...not yet."

Every head in the room turned toward her.

"I'd like some time."

No one objected.

As the meeting ended, Violet slipped the folder into her briefcase.

Back in her office she placed it on her desk.

She didn't open it again.

Instead she looked through the window at the city below.

Fifteen million dollars.

She had never dreamed of becoming wealthy.

She had dreamed of building things.

Another thought entered her mind.

If she sold Clairmont Technologies...

...what would she build next?

For the first time since founding the company, Violet didn't know the answer.

She glanced at the clock.

Half past six.

Too early to go home.

Too late to start anything meaningful.

She picked up her coat.

"I think I'll take a walk."

The receptionist looked up as Violet crossed the lobby.

"Heading home?"

Violet smiled.

"Eventually."

Outside, the evening air felt refreshing.

The business district was slowly emptying.

Office workers hurried toward buses and train stations.

Others met friends in cafés.

Violet simply walked.

Without a destination.

Without a plan.

The city slowly drifted past her.

She barely noticed the people around her.

Her thoughts kept circling around the same question.

If I sold...

...what would I build next?

Minutes passed.

Perhaps longer.

She had completely lost track of time.

Only when she stopped at a street corner did she finally look up.

She blinked.

Without realising it, her aimless walk had brought her in front of an elegant boutique unlike any she had ever noticed before.

Warm golden light shone through its large display windows.

Above the entrance, beautifully crafted letters spelled two simple words.

Scarlett Heels.

Chapter 17 - Anniversary

The boutique closed an hour early.

The first boutique manager.

The architects.

The software team.

The interior designer.

The first supplier families.

Mrs. Bellamy.

Mrs. Parker.

Already holding a glass of champagne.

"You didn't think I'd miss this?"

Scarlett looked around.

One year ago...

this had been the impossible dream.

Today...

it was simply Tuesday.

The boutique manager raised a glass.

"Scarlett?"

She hadn't prepared a speech.

Of course not.

She smiled.

"A year ago..."

"...I thought we were opening a boutique."

She looked around.

"I was wrong."

"We opened a home."

"For our customers."

"For ourselves."

"Thank you."

Silence.

Mrs. Parker started clapping.

Immediately.

Everyone followed standing up.

One after another.

Until the whole room stood.

Scarlett simply looked at them.

Unable to speak.

Later...

Mrs. Bellamy handed Scarlett another glass of champagne.

"You've become rather good at this."

Scarlett laughed.

"I still prefer making shoes."

Mrs. Bellamy smiled.

"So..."

"Where does Scarlett Heels go next?"

"Paris."

"The opening?"

"In two weeks."

Mrs. Bellamy thought for a moment.

"What day?"

"Monday."

A smile spread across Mrs. Bellamy's face.

"What a coincidence."

Scarlett looked at her.

"I'll be in Paris that week as well."

"For Bellamy Investments?"

Mrs. Bellamy nodded.

"A board meeting."

Scarlett laughed.

"So we'll probably wave at each other across the airport."

Mrs. Bellamy smiled.

"My meeting isn't until Wednesday."

Scarlett looked thoughtful.

"I'll still be there on Tuesday."

Mrs. Bellamy raised her champagne glass.

"Then Tuesday belongs to us."

Scarlett smiled.

"I'd like that."

Chapter 18 - Therapy

Violet stood quietly in front of the boutique.

Scarlett Heels

She smiled to herself.

Emma's voice suddenly echoed in her head.

"Whenever life gets complicated..."

"...buy yourself a beautiful pair of shoes."

Violet had laughed every single time Emma had said it.

"That's the most irrational thing I've ever heard."

Emma had simply shrugged.

"Try it once."

Violet looked through the large display window.

Elegant high heels rested on illuminated pedestals as if they belonged in an art gallery rather than a shop.

She had to admit...

...they were beautiful.

She glanced at the price tag.

Her eyebrows rose. She swallowed.

"Well..."

A smile appeared on her face.

"I suppose being the CEO does have one or two advantages."

She opened the door.

A soft chime welcomed her.

The atmosphere inside was unlike any boutique she had ever visited.

There were no crowded shelves.

No endless rows of shoe boxes.

Every model had space to breathe.

Every display invited visitors to stop and admire it.

It felt more like an exhibition than a store.

A friendly sales consultant approached her.

"Good evening, and welcome to Scarlett Heels."

"Good evening."

"Have you visited us before?"

Violet shook her head.

"I'm afraid not."

"Then allow me to be the first to welcome you."

The consultant smiled warmly.

"My name is Julia."

"I'm Violet."

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Violet."

Julia gestured toward the elegant displays.

"Please take your time."

"Our shoes are handcrafted exclusively for each customer."

Violet wandered between the illuminated displays.

Every shoe rested on its own pedestal beneath a soft spotlight.

She stopped in front of a deep aubergine pump.

It was breathtaking.

Almost unconsciously, she reached out her hand.

Then hesitated.

She looked at Julia.

"May I?"

Julia laughed softly.

"Of course."

"It does look a little like an art exhibition, doesn't it?"

Violet smiled.

"I was just thinking that."

She carefully lifted the shoe from its pedestal.

It was lighter than she had expected.

She slowly turned it in her hands.

Her fingertips traced the elegant silhouette.

The flawless stitching.

The impossibly slender heel.

For a few moments she said nothing.

She simply admired it.

"It's beautiful."

Julia smiled.

"We hear that quite often."

"There are so many beautiful models..."

"How do I even choose?"

"That's the easy part."

Julia gently walked beside her.

"Our collection is intentionally small."

"Every model tells its own story."

"There isn't a better shoe."

"There is only the one that speaks to you."

Violet continued looking around.

Then, almost without noticing, she stopped in front of another pedestal.

Julia smiled knowingly.

"I thought that one might catch your eye."

Violet looked at the shoe for another few seconds before quietly nodding.

"I think..."

"...I've just found it."

Julia carefully lifted the display shoe from its pedestal.

"Then let's create your pair."

Violet tilted her head.

"Really?"

Julia nodded.

"Every Scarlett Heel is made specifically for the woman who will wear it."

"That begins with our Tailor Lounge."

"Our... what?"

"The Tailor Lounge."

Julia's smile widened.

"If you have a little time, I'd be delighted to show you."

Violet had nowhere she needed to be.

She smiled.

"I'd like that."

Julia led her through the boutique toward an open, light-filled area unlike anything Violet had expected.

The elegant displays gave way to polished glass, softly illuminated platforms and sophisticated measuring equipment.

Violet slowed to a stop.

Her eyes wandered from one device to the next.

She looked at Julia.

Then back at the equipment.

A faint smile spread across her face.

"Oh..."

"...this is going to be interesting."

Chapter 19 - The Tailor Lounge

Julia led Violet into the bright, open space beyond the boutique.

The atmosphere changed immediately.

The warm elegance of the showroom gave way to something unexpectedly modern.

Glass.

Brushed aluminium.

Soft white lighting.

Large displays quietly presenting measurements and three-dimensional models.

Everything looked precise.

And yet, unmistakably luxurious.

Violet stopped.

"I wasn't expecting this."

Julia smiled.

"Most of our customers aren't."

She guided Violet toward a softly illuminated platform.

"This is where every pair of Scarlett Heels begins."

Violet looked around with genuine curiosity.

"I thought someone would simply measure my feet."

Julia laughed.

"So did almost everyone else."

She gestured toward a sleek scanner integrated into the floor.

"We create a complete three-dimensional model of both feet."

"Not just the size."

"The exact shape."

"The arches."

"The proportions."

"The smallest asymmetries."

Violet nodded slowly.

"Impressive."

Julia continued.

"After that, we analyse the way you walk."

"My gait?"

"Exactly."

"We don't just want your shoes to fit."

"We want them to move naturally with you."

Violet stepped onto the platform.

"Whenever you're ready."

A gentle blue light swept across her feet.

Silent cameras captured every angle.

The large display beside her slowly assembled a remarkably detailed three-dimensional model.

Violet couldn't help smiling.

"That's beautiful."

Julia studied the screen.

"We think so too."

A few moments later, Julia invited her onto a short walking platform.

"As naturally as possible."

Violet took several relaxed steps.

Tiny markers appeared across the display.

Pressure points.

Weight distribution.

Stride length.

Walking rhythm.

The information changed in real time.

Violet watched every line with fascination.

Julia noticed.

"You're one of the few customers who actually watches the screens."

Violet laughed.

"I can't help it."

"I've always been curious about how things work."

Julia smiled.

"Then you're probably enjoying this more than most."

"I really am."

The measurements finished.

Julia reviewed the results with a satisfied nod.

"Perfect."

She touched the display once more.

"Everything has been recorded."

Violet looked one last time at the elegant visualisations.

For a brief moment she almost forgot she had come to buy shoes.

She had simply enjoyed watching a beautifully designed process.

"Shall we continue?"

Julia asked.

Violet smiled.

"Please."

The measurements were complete.

Julia led Violet to a beautifully crafted walnut desk overlooking the Tailor Lounge.

She placed the selected shoe beside a slim tablet.

"Now we create your order."

Violet sat down.

The screen already displayed her name.

Below it, a rotating three-dimensional model of her future shoes slowly turned.

Julia smiled.

"Your measurements have already been transferred."

She entered a few final notes.

"The colour..."

"...the finish..."

"...and your preferred heel height."

Everything was reviewed together one final time.

Julia looked up.

"Does everything look correct?"

Violet nodded.

"It does."

Julia touched the display once more.

"Wonderful."

"Then your personal last will now be created, and your shoes will enter production."

Violet smiled.

"So..."

"...when can I pick them up?"

Julia glanced at the production schedule.

Her smile became slightly apologetic.

"Our current waiting time is approximately..."

"...eight weeks."

Violet blinked.

"...Eight weeks?"

"I'm afraid so."

Julia expected disappointment.

Instead, Violet looked back through the glass wall into the Tailor Lounge.

The scanner.

The walking platform.

The displays.

She remained completely silent.

Julia continued.

"Once your shoes are completed, we'll invite you back for your Collection Ceremony."

"My... Collection Ceremony?"

Julia nodded.

"We believe receiving your Scarlett Heels should be just as memorable as ordering them."

"We'll present your handcrafted shoes personally."

"A glass of champagne will be waiting for you."

"And you'll have all the time you need to enjoy the moment."

A faint smile returned to Violet's face.

"That sounds wonderful."

Julia selected a date eight weeks later.

"Would Thursday afternoon suit you?"

Violet studied her calendar.

"Late afternoon?..."

"Sure."

Julia confirmed the appointment.

"Perfect."

"We're looking forward to welcoming you back."

Violet nodded politely.

Then her eyes wandered once more toward the Tailor Lounge.

Almost absent-mindedly, she murmured,

"...eight weeks..."

Julia looked at her.

"I'm sorry?"

Violet slowly stood up.

A thoughtful smile spread across her face.

"Would you mind..."

She looked through the glass again.

"...taking me back to the Tailor Lounge?"

Julia led Violet back into the Tailor Lounge.

The evening rush had passed.

The measuring stations stood empty.

Violet slowly walked around the central scanner.

She wasn't looking at the hardware.

She was looking at the screens.

The workflow.

The information.

Julia watched her with growing curiosity.

"You really like technology, don't you?"

Violet smiled.

"A little."

She pointed toward one of the displays.

"So this is the three-dimensional foot scan?"

Julia nodded.

"Yes."

"And afterwards comes the walking analysis?"

"Exactly."

"The customer walks across the platform several times."

Violet nodded thoughtfully.

"And all of that becomes part of her customer profile?"

"Yes."

"That's a lot of data..."

Julia folded her arms.

"You're asking very unusual questions."

Violet laughed softly.

"I'm sorry."

"It's an occupational hazard."

Julia smiled.

"I guessed as much."

Violet continued studying the screens.

"So why eight weeks?"

Julia leaned against the counter.

"The shoes are handmade."

"Yes."

"But that's not the bottleneck."

Julia hesitated.

"...No."

"The workshop could actually start much sooner."

Violet turned toward her.

"So what are they waiting for?"

Julia searched for the right words.

"The measurements have to be processed."

"Checked."

"Reviewed."

"Our specialists prepare the customer's profile before production begins."

Violet's eyes returned to the monitor.

"Manually?"

Julia nodded.

"As far as I know."

"And every customer goes through exactly the same process?"

"I believe so."

Violet remained silent.

She looked once more at the scanner.

Then at the gait analysis.

Then back to the customer profile on the screen.

A faint smile appeared.

Julia noticed it immediately.

"What?"

Violet shook her head.

"I'm thinking."

"About?"

Violet looked at the screen for another moment.

"I think..."

"...your craftsmen aren't waiting for leather."

"They're waiting for information."

Julia blinked.

"I've never thought about it that way."

As the boutique door closed behind Violet, Julia remained standing for a moment.

She watched Violet disappear into the evening crowd.

Then she picked up the telephone.

"Scarlett Heels Headquarters."

"This is Julia from the boutique. May I speak with Miss Corvina?"

"One moment please."

A few seconds later, another voice came on the line.

"Scarlett."

"Julia."

A brief pause.

"Is there a problem?"

"No."

Julia smiled.

"Quite the opposite."

"I've just had... a very unusual customer."

Scarlett waited.

"She came in to buy a pair of shoes."

"But after the Tailor Lounge she asked to go through the entire process again."

"Again?"

"She kept asking questions."

"Not complaints."

"Questions."

"The kind that make you think."

Scarlett leaned back in her chair.

"Go on."

"She had a lot of questions and ideas. Then she said something that stayed with me."

"What was that?"

Julia glanced through the glass toward the Tailor Lounge.

"She said our craftsmen aren't waiting for leather..."

"...they're waiting for information."

Silence.

Scarlett spoke first.

"What was her name?"

Julia opened the customer file.

"Violet Clairmont."

Another short silence.

Then Scarlett said quietly,

"Keep her Collection Ceremony exactly as scheduled."

"I will."

"And don't tell her I know."

Julia smiled.

"I wasn't planning to."

Scarlett smiled too.

"I think I'd like to meet Miss Clairmont in person. And thank you for calling."

Chapter 20 - Paris

The Paris boutique had opened the previous afternoon.

Exactly on schedule.

Exactly as Scarlett had imagined.

The Collection Ceremony had already become part of the city's conversation.

The waiting list had begun before the doors had even opened.

Now she looked forward to meeting Mrs. Bellamy the next day.

They met for breakfast.

Mrs. Bellamy looked over the breakfast table.

"Today you're not the CEO of Scarlett Heels."

A short pause.

"Today..."

"...you're simply a thirty-year-old woman."

Their first appointment surprised Scarlett.

Not a boutique.

Not a meeting.

A couture atelier.

Scarlett stood patiently while the couturière circled around her.

Pins.

Measurements.

Tiny adjustments.

Scarlett couldn't help smiling.

The woman stepped back.

"How does that feel, Madame?"

Scarlett looked into the mirror.

She turned slightly.

Then gently touched one sleeve.

"Almost."

The couturière looked concerned.

Scarlett smiled warmly.

"Two millimetres."

For a moment the room became completely silent.

Then Mrs. Bellamy burst into laughter.

The poor woman looked from one to the other, completely bewildered.

Mrs. Bellamy finally caught her breath.

"I'm terribly sorry."

"You've done nothing wrong."

She turned toward Scarlett.

"She says that to everyone."

Scarlett laughed.

"So this..."

She looked back into the mirror.

"...is what my customers feel."

Mrs. Bellamy nodded.

"Exactly."

Later that morning they visited an old Parisian perfumer.

Hundreds of tiny crystal bottles lined the walls.

Nothing carried a famous name.

Nothing needed one.

Scarlett smelled one fragrance after another.

Some elegant.

Some playful.

Some almost overwhelming.

Then she stopped.

Closed her eyes.

Smiled.

Mrs. Bellamy watched her.

"There you are."

Scarlett opened her eyes.

"You knew?"

Mrs. Bellamy smiled.

"I was simply waiting for you to find yourself."

After lunch came something Scarlett had never expected to enjoy.

A spa.

She lasted precisely six minutes before asking how the heated stone beds had been designed.

Mrs. Bellamy laughed.

"You really don't know how to relax."

"I'm trying."

"You are."

Another ten minutes passed.

Scarlett fell asleep.

Mrs. Bellamy quietly covered her with a towel.

And simply let her rest.

Evening

Dinner was unlike anything Scarlett had ever experienced.

Three Michelin stars.

Not extravagance.

Perfection.

Every plate looked almost too beautiful to disturb.

Every course arrived without hurry.

Every movement of the staff seemed carefully choreographed.

Scarlett watched the room with fascination.

"The food is wonderful."

Mrs. Bellamy smiled.

"What are you really looking at?"

Scarlett looked towards the open kitchen.

"The timing."

She watched a waiter silently refill a glass before it was empty.

"The service."

Another course arrived.

Exactly as the conversation reached a natural pause.

"The details."

Mrs. Bellamy nodded.

Scarlett smiled.

"I used to think luxury meant owning beautiful things."

She looked around the restaurant once more.

"I was wrong."

Mrs. Bellamy waited.

"It's creating beautiful moments."

For a while neither woman spoke.

Then Mrs. Bellamy quietly said,

"You never chased luxury."

"You created it."

"Now you're simply living in the world you built."

Scarlett looked around once more.

For the first time...

she didn't feel like a visitor.

She belonged.

When dessert had been served, Mrs. Bellamy glanced at her watch.

"We're expected."

Scarlett looked surprised.

"Again?"

Mrs. Bellamy smiled.

"The evening is still young."

The Louvre stood almost silent beneath the Paris night.

The great glass pyramid reflected thousands of lights.

A curator welcomed them personally.

"Good evening, Mrs. Bellamy."

"Good evening."

Scarlett looked at her.

Mrs. Bellamy smiled innocently.

"I may have made a telephone call."

The curator laughed.

"Several."

The great doors closed quietly behind them.

For the next hour...

the Louvre belonged to two women.

Their footsteps echoed softly through galleries that millions visited every year.

Tonight...

there was no one else.

Scarlett wandered without hurry.

She paused before paintings.

Marble.

Ancient sculptures.

She admired brushstrokes.

The precision of a chisel.

The patience behind every masterpiece.

Eventually they reached the Mona Lisa.

No crowd.

No raised mobile phones.

No voices.

Only silence.

Scarlett stood there for a long while.

Then she smiled.

"I imagined her bigger."

Mrs. Bellamy laughed.

"So does everyone."

Scarlett kept looking.

"It's strange."

"What is?"

"She doesn't need to be larger."

Another pause.

"She's simply... enough."

Mrs. Bellamy looked at Scarlett rather than at the painting.

"So are your shoes."

Scarlett smiled.

Neither woman said another word.

They didn't need to.

When they stepped back into the warm Paris night, the city was still awake.

Mrs. Bellamy looked across the street.

"I believe..."

"...one more stop."

Hidden behind an elegant façade, an exclusive private club pulsed with

music.

No photographers.

No curious glances.

Only members.

Scarlett looked uncertain.

Mrs. Bellamy laughed.

"Oh, don't look so frightened."

"I've never danced in a place like this."

"My dear..."

"Neither had I..."

"...until I was about your age."

They laughed.

The music was modern.

The room alive with energy.

For the first few minutes Scarlett stood awkwardly.

Then Mrs. Bellamy took her hand.

"Stop thinking."

"Just listen."

Scarlett did.

A minute later they were both laughing.

Not elegantly.

Not perfectly.

Simply...

joyfully.

For one evening...

the founder of Scarlett Heels and one of Europe's most respected

investors were simply two women enjoying a night in Paris.

It was well past midnight when the elevator doors opened onto the rooftop terrace.

The city stretched endlessly beneath them.

Someone quietly placed two glasses of champagne beside them and disappeared again.

Far away...

the Eiffel Tower began to sparkle.

Scarlett rested her arms on the glass balustrade.

Neither woman spoke for several minutes.

Finally Scarlett broke the silence.

"When I was nineteen..."

"...I thought success meant building Scarlett Heels."

Mrs. Bellamy listened.

Scarlett continued.

"I've done that."

A gentle breeze crossed the rooftop.

"But today..."

"...I realised something."

She looked at the city below.

"I spent years creating beautiful experiences for other women."

She laughed softly.

"I simply forgot to enjoy one myself."

Mrs. Bellamy raised her glass.

"To remembering."

Scarlett touched her glass gently against hers.

"To beautiful moments."

Chapter 21 - Eight Weeks

The following weeks passed exactly as the previous ones had.

Meetings.

Budgets.

Presentations.

Forecasts.

New customers.

New employees.

The company continued to flourish.

And every evening, Violet returned home wondering where the day had gone.

The folder marked \$15,000,000 remained on the corner of her desk.

She neither accepted nor rejected the offer.

Whenever someone asked about it, she smiled politely.

"I'm still thinking."

That answer became almost routine.

What surprised her most, however, was something entirely different.

Every few days, her eyes wandered to another appointment in her calendar.

Scarlett Heels – Collection Ceremony

She smiled every time she saw it.

It seemed almost absurd.

She was responsible for a rapidly growing technology company.

She was considering the biggest decision of her professional life.

And yet...

...she found herself looking forward to a pair of shoes.

Or perhaps not just the shoes.

She often caught herself thinking about the Tailor Lounge.

The scanner.

The walking platform.

The elegant simplicity of the entire process.

Julia's enthusiasm.

The strange feeling that someone had built the entire experience with exactly the same care that Violet expected from good software.

More than once she almost reached for a notebook.

Just to sketch an idea that had crossed her mind during another board meeting.

She never did.

Instead, she returned her attention to balance sheets, forecasts and strategy papers.

Still...

...the ideas refused to disappear.

When Thursday finally arrived, Violet closed her laptop a little earlier than usual.

One of her managers looked surprised.

"Leaving already?"

Violet smiled.

"I have an appointment."

"Something important?"

She paused for a brief moment.

Then she smiled to herself.

"I think..."

"...it might be."

Later that evening, Scarlett sat alone in her office.

Julia's words still lingered in her thoughts.

"Our craftsmen aren't waiting for leather..."

"...they're waiting for information."

Curious, Scarlett opened her browser.

Violet Clairmont.

One short article caught her attention.

At just eighteen years old, Violet Clairmont left university after securing the first major contract for Clairmont Technologies. Against all advice, she decided to build her company full-time.

Scarlett smiled.

"Nineteen..."

She whispered the number almost to herself.

"I was nineteen."

She closed the browser.

"You're just like me."

She glanced at the calendar.

Eight weeks.

For the first time in a long while, Scarlett found herself looking forward to meeting one particular customer.

Chapter 22 - The First Encounter

Julia welcomed Violet with the same warm smile as eight weeks earlier.

"Welcome back, Miss Clairmont."

"It's good to see you again."

"And you."

Julia led her to a quiet room prepared for the Collection Ceremony.

A bottle of champagne rested in a silver cooler.

In the middle of the table stood an elegant ruby-red presentation box.

Julia smiled.

"Please make yourself comfortable."

"I'll be right back."

Violet looked around.

"...Julia?"

Instead, another woman entered.

She wore an elegant ruby-red business suit.

Confident.

Warm.

Completely at ease.

She smiled.

"I'm afraid Julia asked me to take over today."

Violet looked slightly puzzled.

"Oh..."

The woman walked toward her and offered her hand.

"I'm Scarlett."

Violet smiled.

"Just like the brand."

The woman laughed.

"Actually..."

"...the brand carries my name."

A brief silence.

Violet blinked.

"...Wait."

She looked once more at the woman standing before her.

"You're..."

"...Scarlett?"

"The very same."

Violet laughed in disbelief.

"And you work here?"

Scarlett couldn't help laughing.

"Fortunately."

"I'm still allowed to."

The ice was broken.

Scarlett gestured toward the presentation box.

"I hope Julia looked after you well."

"She was wonderful."

"I know."

Scarlett smiled.

"Julia called me afterwards."

Violet looked worried.

"I hope I didn't cause any trouble."

"Quite the opposite."

Scarlett reassured.

"She told me about your questions."

"And about your ideas."

"I hope you don't mind..."

"...but I looked you up."

Violet laughed.

"I probably would have done the same."

Scarlett smiled.

"I found one short article."

"It said you left university to build Clairmont Technologies."

Violet nodded.

"I did."

Scarlett looked at her for a quiet moment.

"I was nineteen when I founded Scarlett Heels."

A gentle smile appeared.

"My first thought was..."

"...you're just like me."

For a second, neither of them spoke.

Then Scarlett continued.

"I actually wanted to ask you something."

Violet looked curious.

Scarlett gestured toward the Tailor Lounge.

"You looked at our process from a completely different angle."

"I have an IT company that developed the software."

"I thought perhaps..."

"...you could give them one or two ideas."

Violet smiled.

"May I see it again?"

"Of course."

They walked into the Tailor Lounge.

For several minutes, Violet said nothing.

She slowly walked around the scanner.

Studied the displays.

Looked at the customer profile.

She wasn't searching.

She was simply taking it all in once more.

Finally she folded her arms.

"I have to think about it."

She smiled apologetically.

"Actually..."

"...I've been thinking about it on and off for the last two months."

"I don't know why."

"It's fascinating."

Scarlett laughed softly.

"No."

Violet looked at her.

"Don't start putting work into this."

Violet smiled.

"It's not work."

"It's a puzzle."

Scarlett nodded.

The two women stood quietly for another moment.

Then Violet turned toward her.

"How about lunch next week?"

"I'll tell you then."

Scarlett smiled immediately.

"I'd like that."

They returned to the ceremony room.

Scarlett carefully opened the presentation box.

"There she is."

Violet looked down at her handcrafted Scarlett Heels.

For a moment she simply admired them.

"They're beautiful."

Scarlett nodded.

"I never get tired of this part."

Violet slipped into the shoes.

She stood.

Took a careful step.

Then another.

She looked at Scarlett.

"They fit..."

She smiled.

"...like they already knew me."

Scarlett's eyes lit up.

"That's exactly what we were hoping for."

Julia entered carrying two champagne glasses.

She smiled as she saw Violet taking her first confident steps.

"I see everything fits perfectly."

Scarlett accepted one of the glasses and handed the other to Violet.

"To your first pair of Scarlett Heels."

Violet gently touched her glass against Scarlett's.

"...and hopefully not my last."

Scarlett nodded.

"I had a feeling you might say that."

Chapter 23 - Lunch

The following Tuesday arrived sooner than either of them had expected.

Violet stood in front of her wardrobe.

Her usual clothes.

Simple.

Comfortable.

Then her eyes fell on her Scarlett Heels.

She smiled.

"They still don't match anything I own."

She put them on anyway.

Scarlett was already waiting when Violet arrived.

She noticed the shoes immediately.

"I see they survived their first week."

Violet looked down at them and smiled.

"They've hardly left my feet."

Scarlett chuckled.

"I was hoping you might say that."

The waiter showed them to a quiet table by the window.

Menus arrived.

Neither of them opened one.

Scarlett smiled.

"So..."

"...have you solved my puzzle?"

Violet shook her head.

"No."

Scarlett raised an eyebrow.

"No?"

"I spoke to your software company."

"You did?"

"You gave me permission."

Scarlett nodded.

"I did."

Violet leaned back.

"They're good."

"Very good."

"They solved exactly the problem they were asked to solve."

Scarlett waited.

Violet smiled.

"I just don't think it was the right problem."

A smile appeared on Scarlett's face.

"So..."

"...could Clairmont Technologies build something better?"

"No."

"Wrong industry."

"And honestly..."

"...I'd probably decline the project."

Scarlett chuckled.

"I appreciate your honesty."

"Do you know somebody who could?"

Violet thought for a moment.

Then shook her head.

"Unfortunately not."

Silence settled between them.

Then Scarlett said, almost absent-mindedly,

"I wish someone like you worked at Scarlett Heels."

Violet looked at her.

"Thank you."

The waiter arrived with lunch.

The conversation moved on.

Without either of them noticing.

Scarlett spoke about sketching new shoes late at night.

Violet admitted she still solved software problems on weekends simply because she enjoyed them.

Scarlett smiled.

"So neither of us is very good at relaxing."

"I don't think so."

They both chuckled.

At one point Scarlett's phone vibrated.

She glanced at the display.

"My assistant."

She answered.

"No..."

"I'm busy."

"It can wait."

She placed the phone face down on the table.

A little later Violet's phone vibrated.

Scarlett looked at her with a smile.

"Your turn."

Violet answered.

"I'm sorry."

"It'll have to wait."

She put her own phone beside Scarlett's.

Face down.

They looked at each other.

Neither said a word.

Both smiled.

The conversation continued.

About first customers.

About impossible decisions.

About the strange feeling of watching a company become successful enough that it slowly takes away the work you loved doing.

For the first time in a long while, Violet had the feeling she didn't need to explain herself.

Scarlett already understood.

And Scarlett quietly realised she had never met someone who thought about building things quite the way she did.

The waiter cleared away the dessert plates.

Scarlett looked around.

"...We've been here for four hours."

Violet picked up her phone.

"...Five missed calls."

Scarlett chuckled.

"I've got six."

Neither seemed particularly worried.

Neither stood up.

Finally Scarlett smiled.

"I don't think we can disappear for another afternoon tomorrow."

Violet laughed softly.

"My management team would mutiny."

"Mine too."

Another comfortable silence.

Neither seemed ready to end the conversation.

Then Scarlett looked up.

"How about dinner tomorrow?"

Violet immediately smiled.

Then, before she could stop herself, she asked,

"Is this a date?"

For just a moment, neither of them spoke.

Scarlett looked at Violet.

A slow smile appeared.

"Maybe."

Another brief pause.

"Would that be a problem?"

Violet held her gaze.

Then she smiled.

"No."

"...Actually..."

"...I'd like that."

Scarlett nodded.

"So would I."

A brief silence followed.

Then Scarlett wickedly.

"I agree to go out with you under one condition."

Violet looked at her curiously.

"What's that?"

Scarlett let the silence linger for just a moment.

Then her eyes wandered to Violet's outfit.

"You leave the jogging pants at home."

Violet looked down at herself.

Then she laughed.

"Deal."

Outside the restaurant they stood for another moment before parting.

After only a few steps, both turned around at exactly the same time.

They smiled.

Waved.

And continued in opposite directions.

Both already looking forward to tomorrow evening.

Chapter 24 - Dinner

Violet stood in front of her wardrobe.

There wasn't much to choose from.

She picked her nicest dress.

It had served her well for years.

She smiled.

"Please don't embarrass me."

Scarlett was already waiting.

Violet stopped mid-stride.

"You look beautiful!"

Violet nodded.

"I love this!"

Scarlett smiled.

"Thank you."

A brief silence.

Then Scarlett smiled mischievously.

"I don't receive compliments like that very often."

Violet blinked.

"Oh..."

"I didn't mean..."

She stopped.

Scarlett waited.

"I mean..."

"...I don't..."

Scarlett's smile grew just a little.

Violet narrowed her eyes.

"You're enjoying this."

"A little."

Violet laughed.

"I meant your style."

"The dress."

"The colours."

She searched for the right words.

"The whole... you."

Scarlett raised an eyebrow.

"So you don't love ..."

"...me?"

Violet stared at her.

"No."

A beat.

"...Yes."

Another beat.

Then she understood.

A smile slowly spread across her face.

"Oh..."

"...very funny."

Scarlett smiled back.

Violet shook her head.

"Could you teach me?"

Scarlett tilted her head.

"Love..."

"...or style?"

Violet laughed.

"Let's start with style."

Scarlett looked Violet up and down.

"That can be arranged."

They entered the restaurant.

Dinner began with software.

It ended almost immediately.

Instead they talked about childhood.

Books.

Travels they still wanted to make.

The strange loneliness of building a company at twenty.

The even stranger feeling that success quietly stole the work they had loved most.

Hours passed unnoticed.

At one point Violet looked at Scarlett.

"May I ask you something?"

"Of course."

"If somebody offered to buy Scarlett Heels..."

Scarlett smiled.

"I'd say no before they finished the sentence."

Violet smiled.

"I thought so."

Scarlett shrugged.

"I didn't build Scarlett Heels to sell it."

Violet nodded.

"Of course not."

Scarlett smiled.

"What did eight-year-old Violet want to become?"

Violet laughed.

"Definitely not a CEO."

She looked around the restaurant.

"This place is awesome."

Scarlett smiled.

"You usually need a reservation weeks in advance."

"Then how did... "

"I pulled some strings."

"Wow. But I think I'm totally underdressed."

"You are".

Scarlett smiled her mischievous smile again.

"Next Saturday."

Violet looked puzzled.

"Next Saturday?"

"We're going shopping."

"I only need a new dress."

Scarlett smiled.

"No."

"You need a wardrobe."

Violet laughed.

"I had a feeling you'd say that."

Outside the restaurant they lingered for another minute before parting.

Neither seemed eager to leave.

Finally Scarlett smiled.

"Good night, Violet."

"Good night, Scarlett."

They walked away in opposite directions.

Both smiling.

The next morning Violet woke unusually early.

She lay awake for a while.

A new beginning.

A new mission.

A new wardrobe.

... a new love?

She smiled.

Maybe.

She reached for her phone.

She selected a contact.

Northbridge Investments.

She pressed "Call."

"Good morning, Ms. Clairmont."

Violet took a breath.

"I'd like to accept your offer."

Chapter 25 - Shopping

Thursday became a day of negotiations.

Friday became a day of signatures.

By Friday evening, Clairmont Technologies belonged to Northbridge Investments.

Saturday morning arrived with perfect sunshine.

Violet looked at her dress in her wardrobe.

It suddenly seemed...

old.

She smiled.

She put it on.

Scarlett was already waiting.

She looked Violet up and down.

Then nodded.

"A good starting point."

Violet laughed.

"I feel evaluated."

"You are."

"Should I be worried?"

"Not yet."

They both smiled.

Their first stop wasn't a boutique.

It was a tailor.

Violet looked around.

"I thought we'd buy clothes."

"We are."

Scarlett smiled.

"But first..."

"...someone has to learn who you are."

The tailor measured everything with quiet precision.

Shoulders.

Waist.

Sleeves.

Leg length.

Posture.

Even how Violet naturally stood.

When they left, Violet looked puzzled.

"I've never had that done."

Scarlett nodded.

"It shows."

The next shop displayed handbags.

Violet reached for a practical black one.

Scarlett gently moved her hand away.

"No."

"Why?"

"You chose it because it's practical."

"...yes?"

"You'll use practicality all week."

"This one should make you smile."

Violet blinked.

"I've never chosen a handbag because it made me smile."

"See?"

An hour later...

Scarlett rejected another jacket.

"No."

Violet sighed dramatically.

"Wrong colour?"

"Worse."

"What?"

"It apologises."

Violet stared.

"A jacket can apologise?"

Scarlett nodded as if it were obvious.

"Constantly."

Two shops later.

"No."

"The cut?"

"No."

"The fabric?"

"No."

"The person."

Violet studied herself in the mirror.

"The person?"

Scarlett smiled.

"The jacket is wearing you."

"It should be the other way around."

By lunchtime Violet crossed her arms.

"You say 'no' remarkably often."

Scarlett smiled.

"I know."

"When do you say yes?"

"When it feels inevitable."

The afternoon passed surprisingly quickly.

Scarlett occasionally disappeared into another aisle.

Returning with something Violet would never have picked herself.

Most of it went back.

Some stayed.

Slowly...

Very slowly...

A wardrobe began to appear.

Not trendy.

Not expensive.

Simply...

Violet.

Late in the afternoon Scarlett stopped in front of another mirror.

She looked at Violet for several quiet seconds.

Then smiled.

"There you are."

Violet looked at her reflection.

She looked...

like herself.

Only somehow clearer.

More confident.

She smiled.

"I think I know what you mean."

"I was hoping you would."

At the final counter Scarlett glanced at the total.

She raised an eyebrow.

"Oops..."

Violet looked over.

"It is rather expensive."

Scarlett nodded.

"A little."

Violet smiled.

"No problem."

Scarlett looked at her.

"I recently came into some money."

Scarlett laughed.

"How convenient."

They left the last boutique carrying far more bags than Violet thought possible.

She looked at Scarlett.

"I've learned something today."

"Oh?"

"Shopping is exhausting."

Scarlett laughed.

"No."

She nodded toward the bags.

"That..."

"...was wardrobe editing.."

Violet looked back at the shops they had visited.

Then at the bags.

She smiled.

"I think I like editing."

Scarlett smiled back.

"I thought you might."

Scarlett thought a second.

"Now it's my turn."

Violet looked at her.

"You look beautiful."

A tiny pause.

"I love your style."

Violet gave her a mock pout.

"Only the look?"

Both of them smile.

They continued down the street together.

Already discussing dinner.

Chapter 26 - Where Is My Desk?

Monday mornings at Scarlett Heels always began with quiet purpose. The headquarters occupied an entire floor of a modern business building overlooking the city. There were no mahogany executive suites hidden behind frosted glass, no corridors reserved for senior management. Scarlett had never wanted walls between herself and the people building her dream.

Designers refined sketches beneath large mood boards.

Marketing discussed campaign ideas over coffee.

Procurement compared leather samples.

Customer consultants prepared appointments for the day.

At the far end of the open office stood Scarlett's own desk. It was larger than the others only because it had become a gathering place.

Employees stopped there to ask questions, exchange ideas or simply share a thought before returning to work.

The office was already alive when the elevator doors opened.

Scarlett stepped out carrying her familiar ruby-red handbag.

"Good morning."

A chorus of smiles and greetings answered her.

"Morning, Scarlett."

"Good morning."

She walked through the office, exchanging a few words with the design team before placing her handbag beside her desk.

It was going to be an ordinary Monday.

Or so she believed.

A designer suddenly stopped speaking.

Someone near the windows looked toward the elevator.

A chair slowly turned.

Another conversation faded into silence.

Scarlett frowned.

The change spread through the office like a ripple across still water.

She looked up.

"What is—"

The elevator doors opened once more.

A woman stepped into the headquarters carrying a single cardboard box.

Dark hair.

Brilliant violet streaks catching the morning sunlight.

A perfectly tailored deep-violet business dress.

Matching violet heels.

She walked calmly through the office, her expression as composed as ever.

Every employee watched.

No one recognised her.

Scarlett did.

"...Violet?"

Violet smiled warmly.

"Good morning, Scarlett."

She crossed the room without hesitation until she stood only a few feet away.

The office had become completely silent.

Then Violet asked, as naturally as if she had been working there for years,

"Where is my desk?"

Silence.

Nobody understood.

Not the designers.

Not the marketing team.

Not the assistants.

Not even Scarlett.

She stared at Violet, certain she had misunderstood.

"...Your desk?"

"Yes."

Another long pause.

Scarlett searched Violet's face for even the smallest hint of a joke.

There was none.

"Violet..."

She laughed softly, uncertainly.

"...why would you have a desk here?"

Violet answered with complete sincerity.

"At dinner you said you wished someone like me worked for you."

Scarlett blinked.

"I thought about that all weekend."

Violet shifted the cardboard box slightly in her arms.

"You were right."

The room remained utterly still.

Scarlett looked at the box for the first time.

It wasn't filled with random belongings.

A laptop.

A notebook.

A coffee mug.

One small potted plant.

Everything that mattered to Violet seemed to fit inside a single cardboard box.

A thought slowly formed in Scarlett's mind.

She looked back at Violet.

"...Wait."

Her voice had become almost a whisper.

"Did you..."

Violet nodded once.

"I sold Clairmont Technologies."

No one moved.

Scarlett felt the words settle over the room.

Clairmont Technologies.

The company Violet had built.

The company she had led.

The company that had made her one of the most respected technology entrepreneurs in the country.

Gone.

Not lost.

Chosen.

Scarlett looked into Violet's eyes.

"You sold your company..."

"I did."

"...because of one sentence?"

Violet considered the question.

"Not because of one sentence."

She smiled gently.

"Because I realised what I wanted to build next."

Scarlett couldn't speak.

During dinner she had simply voiced a wish.

I wish someone like you worked for me.

She had never imagined those words would change another person's life.

Or her own.

For several seconds neither woman moved.

Then Scarlett stepped forward.

Without another word she wrapped her arms around Violet.

The cardboard box rested between them for a moment before Violet carefully lowered it to the floor and returned the embrace.

The office watched in complete silence.

It was not a romantic embrace.

Not yet.

It was something quieter.

Gratitude.

Trust.

Respect.

Scarlett closed her eyes.

No investor had ever given her a gift as precious as this.

Mrs. Bellamy had believed in her dream.

Violet had chosen to make it her own.

When Scarlett finally spoke, her voice was barely above a whisper.

"Welcome to Scarlett Heels."

Violet smiled.

"Thank you."

Neither woman noticed that several employees had begun smiling themselves.

None of them understood exactly what had just happened.

But all of them sensed they had witnessed something important.

Scarlett released the embrace.

For another few seconds neither of them said anything.

Then Violet glanced around the office.

Her eyes returned to Scarlett.

Her expression remained perfectly serious.

"So..."

A tiny pause.

"...about my desk?"

For a heartbeat the room remained frozen.

Then Scarlett laughed.

A genuine, uncontrollable laugh unlike anything most of her employees

had ever heard.

The tension broke instantly.

Smiles spread across the office.

A few people chuckled.

Even Violet allowed herself the faintest grin.

Scarlett wiped a tear of laughter from the corner of her eye.

"I suppose," she said, still smiling, "we should probably find you one."

Violet nodded once.

"I was hoping you'd say that."

Scarlett picked up the cardboard box herself.

"No," she said with quiet certainty.

"You've carried enough."

Side by side, they walked into the heart of the office.

No contracts had been signed.

No interview had taken place.

No one had been hired.

Yet everyone instinctively understood one thing.

From that Monday morning onward, Scarlett Heels would never be built by one extraordinary woman alone. It would be built by two.

Chapter 27 - Building Together

The following days settled into a rhythm that surprised everyone.

Scarlett never gave Violet an office.

When someone from administration quietly asked whether Ms.

Clairmont should receive an executive office, Scarlett answered without hesitation.

"No."

She looked across the open headquarters.

"She's exactly where she belongs."

A desk was placed beside Scarlett's own.

Not because of hierarchy.

Because that was where conversations naturally began.

Within days the employees stopped seeing Violet as "the former CEO."

She became the person who wandered from department to department asking questions nobody had ever considered.

She spoke with designers about sketches.

With customer consultants about fittings.

With purchasing about suppliers.

With accounting about invoices.

She listened far more than she spoke.

Sometimes she simply thanked people and continued walking.

At first the employees wondered what she was doing.

By the end of the week they realised she wasn't evaluating them.

She was trying to understand how every part of Scarlett Heels fit together.

One afternoon Scarlett found Violet sitting quietly with a notebook filled page after page with diagrams, arrows and handwritten observations.

"So?" Scarlett asked with a smile.

Violet looked up.

"You built something extraordinary."

Scarlett smiled.

"I know."

Violet returned to her notebook.

"...and it's held together with tape."

For a second Scarlett simply stared at her.

Then she burst into laughter.

"So you noticed."

"I noticed several rolls."

Scarlett laughed even harder.

"I suppose that's what happens when a company grows faster than its systems."

Violet nodded.

"It also means the systems already exist."

Scarlett raised an eyebrow.

"They're just hiding."

The following evenings became a routine neither of them planned.

Long after the office had emptied, Scarlett remained at her desk sketching new designs, refining ideas and making notes for future collections.

Beside her, Violet filled notebook after notebook.

Boxes became arrows.

Departments became connections.

Conversations became workflows.

Little by little she transformed the entire company into a map only she fully understood.

Sometimes they spoke for hours.

Sometimes neither of them spoke at all.

They didn't need to.

Scarlett dreamed.

Violet organised those dreams into something that could grow.

It felt strangely effortless.

As though they had been working together for years instead of days.

One evening Scarlett finally leaned back and stretched.

"I think that's enough for today."

Violet smiled without looking up.

"I'll be right behind you."

Scarlett collected her handbag and wished her good night.

Most of the lights had already switched into evening mode as she stepped into the elevator.

Halfway down she frowned.

She had forgotten her notebook.

The elevator doors opened again a minute later.

The office was almost completely dark.

Only one corner remained illuminated.

Scarlett walked toward it.

Violet sat alone before her monitor.

Her jacket hung over the back of her chair.

A loose strand of hair had escaped and fallen across her face.

Lines of code flowed steadily across the screen.

Her fingers danced across the keyboard with effortless precision.

There was no urgency.

No pressure.

No deadline.

Just complete concentration.

Scarlett didn't interrupt.

She simply watched.

For the first time since meeting Violet, she saw not the executive...

not the strategist...

not the entrepreneur...

but the builder.

The woman who loved creating things.

After several quiet minutes Violet sensed someone nearby and looked up.

"Oh."

She smiled apologetically.

"I lost track of time."

Scarlett nodded toward the screen.

"Still working?"

Violet looked genuinely puzzled.

Then she smiled—a smile so relaxed and content that Scarlett had never seen anything quite like it.

"No."

She glanced back at the code.

"I'm having fun."

Scarlett looked at the glowing monitor.

Then back at Violet.

And suddenly she understood what had really happened.

Violet had not left Clairmont Technologies because she wanted something bigger.

She had left because, somewhere along the way, she had stopped building.

Here, in a quiet office long after everyone else had gone home, she had found it again.

Scarlett smiled softly.

Without another word, she picked up the notebook she had forgotten.

As she walked toward the elevator, she glanced back one last time.

Violet hadn't even noticed her leaving.

She was already immersed in another line of code.

Already creating.

Already home.

Chapter 28 - Still Eight Weeks

The months that followed passed almost unnoticed.

To the employees of Scarlett Heels, Violet had simply become part of everyday life.

She arrived early.

She left late.

Most days she spoke little.

Instead, she listened.

Whenever someone encountered a problem, Violet never asked who had made the mistake.

She asked why the mistake had been possible.

Gradually, whiteboards appeared beside her desk.

Sheets filled with diagrams covered one wall.

Boxes connected by arrows.

Departments linked to suppliers.

Boutiques connected to production.

Production connected to logistics.

To everyone else it looked impossibly complicated.

To Violet it was simply the company.

Three months after her first day, she walked over to Scarlett's desk

carrying a laptop.

"I think we're ready."

Scarlett looked up.

"So soon?"

Violet smiled.

"The first version."

Scarlett laughed.

"There are already more?"

"There always are."

Together they activated the new production system.

For several seconds...

nothing happened.

Then phones began ringing.

Someone called from a boutique.

A barcode scanner refused to connect.

An hour later another boutique reported duplicate customer records.

One printer insisted on printing shipping labels upside down.

A supplier couldn't log in.

One fitting appointment vanished before mysteriously reappearing ten minutes later.

The office became increasingly hectic.

Employees hurried from desk to desk.

Someone apologised.

"I'm so sorry, Violet."

Violet looked up from her keyboard.

"Good."

The employee blinked.

"...Good?"

"I was beginning to worry we wouldn't find any bugs."

She smiled.

"I prefer discovering them today rather than after ten thousand customers."

The atmosphere immediately relaxed.

There was no blame.

Only problems waiting to be solved.

For the next several weeks Violet became a familiar sight.

One moment she sat writing code.

The next she was standing beside a boutique consultant listening carefully.

Then she disappeared into a meeting with production before returning to her keyboard.

Every improvement solved one problem...

and uncovered another.

Exactly as she had expected.

By early summer the headquarters had become noticeably quieter.

Support calls became fewer.

Production schedules became reliable.

Deliveries left the warehouse exactly when they should.

Employees slowly stopped thinking about the software.

Which, to Violet, was the greatest compliment software could receive.

It simply worked.

Summer passed.

Scarlett hardly noticed the calendar.
Business was growing faster than ever.
One September morning a quarterly operations report landed on her desk.
She skimmed through the familiar figures.
Sales.
Production. Up.
Revenue. Up.
Then her eyes stopped.
She frowned.
Read the same line again.
Then a third time.
Across the room Violet was quietly typing.
"Violet?"
She looked up.
"Hm?"
Scarlett held up the report.
"...Is this correct?"
Violet walked over.
She read the page.
"Yes."
Scarlett looked from the report back to Violet.
"The average delivery time after a Tailor Lounge appointment..."
She paused.
"...used to be eight weeks. Going on ten."
Violet nodded.

Scarlett looked down once more.

"...It's eight days."

The office gradually fell silent as nearby employees sensed something unusual.

Scarlett lowered the report.

She looked at Violet for a long moment.

Then she smiled.

"This is why production and revenue go up."

For perhaps the first time since joining Scarlett Heels, Violet didn't immediately have an answer.

She had measured processing times.

Production efficiency.

Warehouse throughput.

She had never thought about time that way.

Scarlett looked around the office.

"Everyone... could I have your attention for a moment?"

Conversations stopped.

Designers turned their chairs.

The marketing team looked up from their laptops.

The room grew quiet.

Scarlett held the report in her hand.

"Six months ago..."

She smiled.

"...our customers waited an average of eight weeks after visiting our Tailor Lounge before receiving their shoes."

She paused.

"Today..."

"...they wait eight days."

For a heartbeat no one spoke.

Then the office erupted into applause.

Not because a manager expected it.

Because every person there remembered the countless evenings Violet had remained behind after everyone else had gone home.

They remembered the endless diagrams.

The endless questions.

The quiet determination.

Violet stood frozen.

Applause had never been her favourite thing.

She waited for it to fade before speaking.

"It wasn't just me."

Scarlett nodded.

"No."

She looked around the room.

"It never is."

The applause began again.

This time everyone was smiling.

Violet smiled too.

Only a little.

But enough for Scarlett to notice.

Later that evening, after the headquarters had emptied once more,

Scarlett passed Violet's desk.

The monitor glowed softly in the dim office.

New lines of code appeared on the screen.

Scarlett laughed.

"I suppose you're improving it already."

Without taking her eyes off the monitor, Violet answered,

"Of course."

Scarlett shook her head.

"It finally works."

Violet smiled.

"Exactly."

She typed another line.

"Now I can make it better."

Scarlett leaned against the door frame, watching for a moment.

The company had grown.

The waiting time had fallen from eight weeks to eight days.

Employees were happier.

Customers were happier.

The business had changed.

But looking at Violet, none of that seemed to matter most.

What mattered was the expression on her face.

She wasn't chasing another promotion.

She wasn't building another company.

She wasn't trying to become successful.

She was simply doing what she loved.

Building.

Scarlett smiled to herself.

Perhaps that was the greatest success of all.

Chapter 29 - Belonging

Autumn arrived quietly.

From the outside, Scarlett Heels looked unstoppable.

Boutiques reported record sales.

Customers no longer waited months for their shoes.

The Tailor Lounge had become one of the company's greatest attractions.

Fashion magazines called Scarlett Heels the fastest rising luxury house in Europe.

Everyone celebrated.

Except Scarlett.

Not because she wasn't proud.

Because success had given her time to think again.

One afternoon she stood unnoticed inside the boutique, watching a young woman collect her new Scarlett Heels.

The fitting had been perfect.

The presentation elegant.

The customer left smiling, carefully carrying the deep-red box in both hands.

Scarlett smiled too.

Then, as the boutique door closed behind the woman, she frowned.

The moment was over.

The customer had received a beautiful pair of shoes.

But the story had ended the instant she stepped outside.

That thought stayed with Scarlett.

A week later Scarlett and Violet attended a charity gala at the invitation of one of Mrs. Bellamy's foundations.

The ballroom glittered beneath crystal chandeliers.

Collectors, entrepreneurs, artists, athletes and actresses filled the room.

Scarlett recognised several women wearing Scarlett Heels.

Violet quietly noticed the same thing.

"They recognise each other," she whispered.

Scarlett nodded.

"They always do."

Later that evening an auction began.

A painting sold for three hundred thousand euros.

The applause was warm.

A sculpture followed.

Nearly half a million.

Again, applause.

Scarlett watched the bidders rather than the auctioneer.

None of them seemed interested in owning the most expensive object in the room.

They enjoyed becoming part of something larger than themselves.

On the drive home neither woman spoke for several minutes.

The city lights drifted across the wind shield.

Finally Scarlett broke the silence.

"Do you know what fascinated me tonight?"

Violet glanced across.

"The generosity?"

Scarlett shook her head.

"The prices?"

Again Scarlett shook her head.

"What fascinated me..."

She searched for the right words.

"...was that nobody cared what those things were worth."

Violet thought for a moment.

"They cared what their money accomplished."

Scarlett nodded slowly.

"They were buying a story."

"The object wasn't the reason they were bidding."

Violet looked at her.

Scarlett continues:

"It was proof that they had been part of tonight."

After a while Violet smiled.

"That's an unusual thing for a shoe designer to say."

Scarlett laughed softly.

She looked out of the window.

"Women buy our shoes because they're beautiful."

"They buy them because they're comfortable."

"They buy them because everyone recognises them."

Violet nodded.

"Yes."

Scarlett remained quiet.

Then she added,

"But after they leave the boutique..."

She let the words linger.

The following morning Scarlett arrived carrying a notebook instead of design sketches.

She spent the day writing.

Crossing out ideas.

Starting again.

By lunchtime several pages had disappeared beneath heavy black lines.

That evening Violet wandered past Scarlett's desk.

"Bad day?"

Scarlett turned the notebook around.

Every page was covered with abandoned ideas.

"Excellent day."

Violet smiled.

"Because you know what doesn't work?"

"Exactly."

She leaned back.

"I've been thinking about luxury."

"That sounds dangerous."

"It usually is."

Violet pulled up a chair.

Scarlett drew a simple circle on a blank page.

"This..."

She tapped on it.

"...is where we are."

"A woman buys Scarlett Heels."

Violet nodded.

Scarlett drew an arrow leading away from the circle.

"Then she goes home."

Another pause.

"And that's the end."

Violet looked at the sketch.

"She still has beautiful shoes."

Scarlett looked up.

"But I want her journey to continue."

Over the next several evenings the notebook slowly filled again.

Waiting lists.

Scarlett crossed them out.

Membership cards.

Crossed out.

Exclusive boutiques.

Crossed out.

Private clubs.

Crossed out.

None of it felt right.

One evening Violet looked over Scarlett's shoulder.

"You've rejected quite a lot."

"I know."

"What are you looking for?"

Scarlett closed the notebook.

"I'm not sure yet."

She smiled.

"But when I find it..."

"...I'll recognise it."

Violet turned to leave.

Halfway across the office Scarlett called after her.

"Violet?"

She stopped.

"If we ever create something truly extraordinary..."

Violet waited.

"...it has to make people's lives better."

Violet nodded once.

"I wouldn't want to build it otherwise."

Scarlett watched her disappear into the development corner.

Then she opened a fresh page.

For the first time in days...

she didn't write the word shoe.

She wrote a different word.

Belonging.

Chapter 30 - Searching

The word remained alone on the page.

Belonging.

Scarlett looked at it for a long time.

Then she closed the notebook.

She still didn't know what it meant.

Only that it felt closer than anything she had written before.

The following days became an unusual routine.

Whenever Scarlett had a spare hour, she returned to the notebook.

Ideas appeared.

Ideas disappeared.

One afternoon Violet sat down opposite her.

"You've been thinking about this all week."

Scarlett nodded.

"I have."

"Any progress?"

Scarlett smiled.

"I've discovered many bad ideas."

"That's usually progress."

Scarlett turned the notebook around.

"Tell me what you think."

Violet began reading.

"Membership."

A line through it.

"VIP Club."

Crossed out.

"Lifetime Privileges."

Crossed out twice.

Violet looked up.

"I see a pattern."

"So do I."

"They all feel..."

She searched for the right word.

"...commercial."

Scarlett nodded immediately.

"Exactly."

"I don't want to sell privilege."

Silence settled between them.

Scarlett tapped her pencil against the notebook.

"I want women to feel proud."

"Proud of what?"

Scarlett didn't answer straight away.

Finally she said,

"Of belonging."

That evening they walked home instead of taking the car.

The autumn air was cool.

People hurried past carrying shopping bags.

A young woman crossed the street wearing Scarlett Heels.

Both of them noticed.

A second woman approached from the opposite direction.

She, too, wore Scarlett Heels.

For a brief moment their eyes met.

Both smiled.

Neither slowed down.

They simply continued walking.

Scarlett watched them disappear.

"Did you see that?"

Violet nodded.

"They've never met."

"No."

"But they recognised each other."

Another few steps.

"They already feel connected."

Scarlett smiled.

"We just haven't given them a reason."

The sentence stayed with both of them.

The next evening the notebook returned to the table between them.

Scarlett had filled another dozen pages.

Violet read through them.

Eventually she reached the final page.

There was only one sentence.

People don't want more luxury.

Below it...

They want to belong.

Violet looked at Scarlett.

"I think you've found it."

Scarlett leaned back.

"It still isn't enough."

"What isn't?"

"I know why."

She closed the notebook.

"I still don't know how."

The answer came from an unexpected memory.

Mrs. Bellamy.

Scarlett remembered the first investment meeting years earlier.

Not the money.

The words.

"One day, help another woman the way I'm helping you today."

Scarlett sat upright.

Violet looked up from her laptop.

"What happened?"

Scarlett didn't answer immediately.

Instead she walked to the whiteboard.

She wrote one sentence.

Belonging must be given.

She stared at it.

Then slowly shook her head.

"No..."

She erased the first two words.

She wrote again.

Belonging cannot be bought.

This time she stepped back.

Violet stood and joined her.

For nearly a minute neither of them spoke.

Finally Violet broke the silence.

"If it can't be bought..."

"...how does someone receive it?"

Scarlett smiled.

"They're chosen."

The room became quiet.

Not because either of them was uncertain.

Because they both understood the weight of that word.

Chosen.

Not for wealth.

Not for fame.

Not because they asked.

Because Scarlett Heels believed they belonged.

Violet folded her arms.

"That would make every Selection deeply personal."

Scarlett turned.

"It has to be."

"If it ever feels automatic..."

Violet finished the sentence.

"...it stops meaning anything."

Scarlett nodded.

"Exactly."

Violet thought for another moment.

Then she smiled.

"I know my job."

Scarlett raised an eyebrow.

"You do?"

"My job isn't building software."

She looked at the words on the whiteboard.

"My job is making sure this never feels like software."

Scarlett laughed softly.

"No."

A warm smile spread across her face.

"Your job is protecting it."

Violet smiled back.

"I can do that."

Scarlett picked up the marker again.

This time she didn't write features.

She didn't write prices.

She didn't write shoe names.

She wrote a single heading at the top of the board.

The Scarlett Heels Collection.

Then she stood there quietly.

For the first time, she could almost see it.

Chapter 31 - The Collection

For several days the whiteboard remained almost empty.

Only one heading stood at the top.

The Scarlett Heels Collection.

Scarlett refused to rush it.

Each evening she added another thought.

Not products.

Not prices.

Principles.

One afternoon Violet stood beside her, reading quietly.

"There are no shoe designs."

Scarlett smiled.

"Not yet."

"There are no sales figures."

"No."

"No production targets."

Scarlett shook her head.

"I can build shoes any time."

She looked at the whiteboard.

"I'm building the reason first."

Violet nodded.

"That feels like you."

The breakthrough came unexpectedly.

Scarlett picked up a marker and drew a single line.

At the beginning she wrote:

Scarlett Heels

At the end she wrote:

Family

She stared at it.

"That's it."

Violet looked at the two words.

"You don't want customers."

Scarlett smiled.

"I already have customers."

"I want women who stay."

She added five marks along the line.

Not equally spaced.

Natural.

Like milestones along a path.

She looked at them for a while before writing the names.

Foundation

Signature

Grand

Couture

She stopped.

The fifth mark remained empty.

Violet noticed.

"You're missing one."

Scarlett smiled.

"I know."

She hesitated.

"The last one has to mean something."

Silence filled the office.

Then Scarlett slowly wrote one final word.

Royal

She stepped back.

Neither of them spoke.

The five names seemed strangely familiar, as though they had been waiting to be discovered rather than invented.

Violet was the first to break the silence.

"What happens now?"

Scarlett uncapped another marker.

She drew a small circle around Foundation.

"This is where the journey begins."

She didn't draw circles around the other names.

"Not everyone continues."

"No."

"Some women will."

Scarlett nodded.

"And they won't decide."

Violet looked at her.

"We will."

Scarlett considered that for a moment.

Then she quietly corrected her.

"No."

"Scarlett Heels will."

She smiled.

"The house chooses."

Violet read the board once more.

"No applications."

Scarlett nodded.

"No waiting list."

Another nod.

"No membership fees."

"No."

Violet smiled.

"I like that."

"So do I."

She looked back at Foundation.

"The first Selection."

Scarlett nodded.

"And after that?"

"Nothing."

Violet frowned.

"Nothing?"

Scarlett laughed.

"I mean nothing they have to do."

"If they belong..."

"...the next letter will find them."

Violet stood for several moments.

Finally she said,

"This can't feel automated."

Scarlett smiled.

"I was hoping you'd say that."

"Every letter has to feel personal."

"Yes."

"Every ceremony has to be unforgettable."

"Yes."

"Every woman has to feel that she was chosen for who she is."

Scarlett nodded once more.

"Exactly."

Violet folded her arms.

"I know how to protect that."

Scarlett looked at her.

"I knew you would."

Scarlett picked up the notebook she had filled over the past weeks.

She turned to the very first page.

Across the top she wrote a single sentence.

Luxury is not the shoe. Luxury is belonging.

She closed the notebook.

A smile appeared on her face.

"I think we've found it."

Violet looked once more at the whiteboard.

At the five names.

At the path that connected them.

Then she asked,

"What about the women who never receive a Selection?"

Scarlett answered without hesitation.

"They'll still own extraordinary shoes."

"And those who do?"

Scarlett looked back at the word Foundation.

"They'll receive something money can't buy."

Violet smiled.

"A place."

Scarlett nodded.

"A family."

She walked to the window.

The city stretched out beneath them, filled with millions of people who had never heard of the Scarlett Heels Collection.

They would.

Not because of advertising.

Not because of celebrities.

Not even because of the shoes.

Because women talk.

One woman would notice another wearing a Foundation.

She would recognise it instantly.

Not simply as an exceptional shoe.

But as the quiet symbol of a remarkable honour.

Scarlett smiled.

"I think it's time to plan a party."

Violet looked up.

"A party?"

Scarlett laughed.

"No."

She looked once more at the word Foundation.

"A welcome."

And with that single sentence, the Foundation Party was born.

Dear Mrs. Williams,

During the past year, many members of the
Scarlett Heels family have spoken warmly of you.
Not about the shoes you wear.
But about the kindness, elegance and quiet
confidence with which you move through life.
Those are qualities we admire deeply.

For that reason, I would like to extend a very
personal invitation.

You have been selected to become a Foundation
Member of Scarlett Heels.

Foundation is not available in our boutiques.

It cannot be requested.

It begins only with a personal Selection.

Should you choose to accept, your Foundation Heel
will be handcrafted exclusively for you – a unique
work of art to wear and the visible symbol of
your place within the Foundation.

I would then be delighted to welcome you to the
First Foundation Party, to be held in New York City
on Saturday, June 18, 2016, where you will meet an
exceptional circle of women who, like yourself, have
each been selected for the person they are.

The Foundation was created with a simple purpose.

To celebrate remarkable women.

To bring them together.

And to help other women begin journeys of their own.

For that reason, all proceeds from the Foundation.
Collection are dedicated to charitable initiatives that
support women around the world.

I very much hope you will accept my invitation.

With warm regards,

Scarlett

Chapter 33 - The Foundation Party

Mrs. Williams arrived at the Foundation Party a little early.

She had considered waiting outside.

Instead, she took a breath and stepped through the revolving doors.

The ballroom occupied the top floor of a historic New York hotel overlooking Central Park.

As the elevator doors opened, she saw only a handful of women.

Soft music.

A few conversations.

No photographers.

No registration desk.

No reporters.

Just an elegant room waiting to come alive.

And Scarlett.

She stood at the entrance herself.

Not behind a podium.

Not surrounded by assistants.

Simply welcoming each guest as though they were arriving at her home.

When she saw Mrs. Williams, her face brightened.

"Mrs. Williams."

She stepped forward and offered both hands.

"I'm so pleased you came."

"Thank you for inviting me."

Scarlett smiled warmly.

"I've been looking forward to meeting you."

For a moment Mrs. Williams forgot every sentence she had prepared during the flight to New York.

Scarlett laughed softly.

"Please..."

She gestured toward the ballroom.

"...enjoy the evening."

Mrs. Williams thanked her once more and walked inside.

Already, the nervousness she had carried all afternoon had almost disappeared.

The ballroom was elegant without trying to impress.

A few women stood talking beneath crystal chandeliers.

Others admired the view across Central Park.

Everyone seemed relaxed.

Nobody appeared to know quite what the evening would bring.

Mrs. Williams recognised several faces almost immediately.

A celebrated concert pianist.

The founder of an international charity.

A well-known television journalist.

She wondered whether she should introduce herself.

Before she had decided, someone approached carrying a glass of champagne.

She smiled.

"Hello, I'm Jennifer."

Mrs. Williams looked at the famous actress in disbelief.

For the briefest moment she forgot her own name.

Then she smiled.

"I'm..."

She almost answered,

"Mrs. Williams."

Instead she laughed softly.

"...Susan."

Jennifer smiled.

"It's lovely to meet you, Susan."

"It is..."

Susan hesitated.

"...lovely to meet you too."

Within minutes they were talking about travel.

Jennifer had recently spent several weeks in New Zealand.

Susan recommended a small vineyard outside Queenstown.

Jennifer took out her phone.

"I'll have to remember that."

Susan found herself laughing.

She had almost forgotten who she was talking to.

As more guests arrived, the room slowly filled.

Every introduction followed the same pattern.

"Claire."

"Emma."

"Isabella."

First names.

Nothing more.

Professions remained outside.

It didn't feel deliberate.

It simply felt natural.

Scarlett looked around the room.

Thirty-six women.

Thirty-six different stories.

She smiled.

"When I founded Scarlett Heels..."

"...I thought I was creating beautiful shoes."

A few guests smiled.

"It took me many years to realise..."

"...that shoes were only the beginning."

She paused.

"I invited each of you here for exactly the same reason."

Her eyes moved gently across the room.

"Not because of what you do."

Another pause.

"But because of who you are."

Susan glanced around.

Jennifer smiled.

Emma looked quietly at the floor.

No one seemed embarrassed.

Only... seen.

Scarlett continued.

"Each of you has already commissioned your Foundation Heel."

"I hope you'll enjoy wearing it."

A smile crossed her face.

"But tonight isn't really about the shoes."

She let the words settle.

"It's about the women wearing them."

Dinner was announced.

There was no seating plan.

No head table.

No reserved places.

Scarlett had made only one request.

"Sit wherever the conversation takes you."

Susan found herself between Jennifer and Emma.

Within minutes they were laughing.

Travel.

Books.

Childhood memories.

Favourite cities.

Someone confessed she had once become hopelessly lost in Venice.

Jennifer admitted she still couldn't fold a fitted sheet.

The table burst into laughter.

Susan suddenly realised something.

For over an hour...

nobody had mentioned work.

It was wonderfully refreshing.

After dinner Scarlett tapped her glass.

"I have one more thing."

A member of the staff quietly placed a small ruby-red envelope beside every plate.

Inside was a single card.

Heavy.

Elegant.

Embossed in gold.

The Scarlett Heels Alliance

The women looked at one another curiously.

Scarlett waited until everyone held the card.

"This..."

she said softly,

"...is not a benefit."

"It's a promise."

The room became completely still.

"Tonight you became Foundation Members."

"That isn't only a privilege."

"It is also a responsibility."

She smiled.

"One day you may need another Foundation Member."

A pause.

"One day another Foundation Member may need you."

Susan slowly turned the card over.

On the back were only three things.

A telephone number.

A website.

Her personal Alliance Code.

Nothing more.

Scarlett continued.

"If you travel to another city..."

"...and would like company..."

"Call us."

"If you need advice..."

"Call us."

"If life becomes unexpectedly difficult..."

Another pause.

"Call us."

She looked around the room.

"We may not always have the perfect answer."

"But we will always try."

A warm smile appeared on her face.

"And I ask the same of you."

Several women nodded almost instinctively.

Scarlett lifted her own card.

"Someone once wrote..."

A playful smile appeared.

"You'll Never Walk Alone."

A ripple of knowing smiles moved through the room.

"I've always thought that was a beautiful promise."

She looked around the thirty-six women.

"I hope, from tonight onward..."

"...it becomes ours."

No applause followed.

It somehow didn't seem appropriate.

Instead, thirty-six women quietly looked at the small card in their hands.

It suddenly felt far more valuable than its size suggested.

The evening continued.

Phone numbers were exchanged.

Plans were made.

A charity founder arranged to visit a children's hospital recommended by Emma.

Jennifer accepted Susan's invitation to visit the vineyard in New Zealand one day.

Someone suggested meeting again in London before next year's Foundation Party.

The conversations flowed as though the women had known one another for years.

Susan looked around the room.

Scarlett was speaking quietly with Violet near one of the windows.

Violet said something.

Scarlett looked across the ballroom.

Thirty-six women were laughing together.

She smiled.

Just for a moment.

Susan had the curious feeling she had witnessed the completion of a

dream.

Late that evening she returned to her hotel overlooking Central Park.

She placed three things carefully on the desk.

Scarlett's handwritten invitation.

The Alliance card.

Her Foundation Heel.

For a long moment she simply stood there.

Then she smiled.

"I came to New York for a shoe."

She looked once more at the Alliance card.

"...I left with thirty-five new friends."

She switched off the light.

Outside, New York shimmered in the warm summer night.

Inside, on the desk, the small ruby-red Alliance card caught the moonlight.

It seemed almost impossible...

that something so small could carry such a remarkable promise.

Chapter 34 - One Fine Day

Sydney welcomed the morning with brilliant sunshine.

Cindy counted the banknotes on her small kitchen table one last time.

She smiled.

For four months she had put aside a little money from every pay check.

No expensive lunches.

No new clothes.

No little luxuries.

Today, for the first time in her life...

she was about to buy herself one.

The Scarlett Heels boutique was even more beautiful than she had imagined.

Elegant.

Quiet.

Nothing felt rushed.

A consultant welcomed her with a warm smile.

"Good morning. Welcome to Scarlett Heels."

Cindy returned the smile.

"I've been saving for this."

The consultant's smile became even warmer.

"Then today is a special day."

"It is."

Very much so.

The Tailor Lounge was unlike anything Cindy had ever experienced.

Every detail seemed designed to make her feel welcome.

The careful measurements.

The three-dimensional scan.

The quiet explanations.

The feeling that, for this one hour, the entire boutique existed only for her.

She loved every minute of it.

When everything was finished, the consultant handed her a small appointment card.

"We'll see you in eight days."

Cindy looked at it and laughed.

"I've waited four months."

"I think I can manage another eight days."

Eight days later she returned.

Her Collection Ceremony was everything she had imagined.

And somehow even more.

The deep-red box.

Her name embossed in gold.

Cindy Raleigh

She carefully lifted the lid.

There they were.

Her very first pair of Scarlett Heels.

The consultant smiled.

"They fit perfectly."

Cindy took a few careful steps.

Then a few more.

She stopped.

"They're..."

She searched for the right word.

"...comfortable."

She hadn't expected that.

For months she had imagined what it would feel like to wear Scarlett Heels.

The reality was somehow even better.

She looked down.

For a long moment she simply admired them.

A tiny smile spread across her face.

Almost without noticing, her eyes became moist.

She laughed quietly at herself and gently wiped away the little tear.

As she looked up again, her gaze fell on the large presentation screen behind the Collection Lounge.

An extraordinary Scarlett Heel unlike anything she had ever seen slowly rotated against a black background.

Above it stood a single word.

Foundation

Cindy tilted her head.

"What's Foundation?"

The consultant followed her gaze and smiled.

"It's the next chapter."

She briefly explained the Foundation.

The handwritten invitation.

The annual Foundation Party.

Thirty-six women.

The Alliance.

The promise to help one another.

And that Foundation Membership could never be requested.

Only offered.

Cindy looked once more at the Foundation Heel.

"May I ask..."

"...what something like that costs?"

"The Foundation Heel is fifty thousand dollars."

Cindy was speechless.

The consultant smiled.

"It's the most expensive shoe we make."

A small pause.

"It's also the only one we don't earn a dollar on."

Now Cindy looked up.

The consultant continued:

"Every cent is donated."

Cindy looked down at the Scarlett Heels she had just collected.

Only minutes ago they had seemed like the fulfilment of a dream.

They still were.

But somehow...

they had also become the beginning of one.

She smiled.

Very softly.

"One fine day..."

The consultant smiled back.

"I hope so."

Outside, Sydney welcomed her with bright afternoon sunshine.

Cindy walked a little more slowly than usual.

Not because of the heels.

Because she enjoyed every single step.

At the next intersection she passed her bank.

She stopped.

Looked through the glass doors.

Then smiled.

There would be another savings account.

Not today.

Not tomorrow.

There was no hurry.

She had just begun.

With one last glance at her Scarlett Heels, she continued down the sunlit street.

One fine day.

Chapter 35 - Amethyst

Violet entered the design studio carrying something wrapped in black velvet.

Scarlett looked up from a collection sketch and smiled.

"You've found something."

Violet nodded.

"I have."

She carefully unfolded the cloth.

A rough piece of deep-purple amethyst rested on the table. Even unpolished, the crystal caught the afternoon light and scattered countless shades of violet across the room.

The conversation stopped.

Designers, engineers and craftsmen gathered around the table.

Violet gently ran her fingertips over one of the crystal faces.

"I want an amethyst heel."

Silence.

Finally, the head engineer cleared his throat.

"That can't be done."

"Amethyst is too brittle."

"It can't support a person's weight."

"It will crack."

"It won't pass certification."

Violet looked around the room.

Then she smiled.

"I didn't ask why it can't be done."

She looked from one face to the next.

"I asked how."

The atmosphere changed immediately.

The discussion became alive.

"A titanium core could carry the load."

"We'd have to hide it completely."

"The crystal would need support."

"The bonding has to survive years of walking."

"The optics will be difficult. Titanium will show through."

"What if the crystal isn't solid?"

"What if the outside is natural amethyst?"

"What if we create the interior from an engineered crystal?"

Ideas began replacing objections.

Scarlett leaned quietly against the table.

She never interrupted.

She simply watched Violet.

For the next weeks the design studio became a laboratory.

The first prototype looked magnificent.

The crystal fractured.

The second prototype survived every mechanical test.

The titanium shimmered faintly through the heel.

The third prototype hid the structure perfectly.

Unfortunately, the crystal distorted the light in an unnatural way.

The fourth prototype looked almost perfect.

Everyone gathered as Violet slipped on the shoe.

She stood.

Took one careful step.

A second.

A third.

A tiny sound.

Tick.

Nobody moved.

Near the bottom edge of the heel, scarcely visible, a hairline crack appeared.

The room became completely silent.

Violet looked at the crack for several seconds.

Then she carefully removed the shoe and placed it back onto the workbench.

"Again."

Nobody complained.

Nobody questioned the project.

The prototype disappeared into the workshop.

Another week passed.

Then another.

One morning Violet walked into Scarlett's office carrying a familiar black velvet cloth.

Scarlett looked up.

Without a word Violet unfolded it.
The heel standing before them seemed impossible.
It appeared to have been carved from a single flawless piece of
Brazilian amethyst.
Deep violet near the centre.
Almost transparent at the edges.
Thousands of tiny reflections danced inside the crystal as sunlight
moved across the room.
Scarlett picked it up.
Slowly she turned it between her fingers.
She searched for a joint.
A seam.
Any indication that engineering hid beneath the crystal.
She found nothing.
Violet quietly put on the finished shoe.
She crossed the office.
Turned.
Walked back.
Every step was confident.
Every reflection inside the heel remained alive.
She stopped in front of Scarlett.
"It works."
Scarlett smiled.
"It does."
For a moment neither of them spoke.
Violet simply admired the shoe.

After weeks of sketches, calculations, prototypes and broken crystals,
she finally had the amethyst heel she had imagined.

Scarlett continued turning the shoe slowly in her hands.

Finally she asked,

"Do you know what you've done?"

Violet answered without hesitation.

"I made an amethyst heel."

Scarlett smiled and gently shook her head.

"No."

She placed the shoe on the table.

"You invented a new language."

Violet looked at her, puzzled.

Scarlett's eyes never left the crystal heel.

"We won't stop at amethyst."

She paused.

"This defines the complete 2017 collection!"

Only then did Violet begin to understand.

She had never intended to redefine an entire collection.

She only wanted one beautiful shoe.

Scarlett, however, was already seeing the future.

She looked once more at the shimmering heel.

Then she smiled.

"If we're going to introduce this..."

She looked at Violet.

"...we'll photograph it where people believe it was born."

Chapter 36 - Brazil

Rio de Janeiro welcomed them with heat.

As Scarlett stepped out of the terminal, warm Atlantic air replaced the cool climate they had left behind.

Traffic flowed endlessly.

Yellow taxis.

Street vendors.

Palm trees bending gently in the evening breeze.

Rio seemed alive every second of the day.

Even Violet stopped for a moment.

"It feels..."

She searched for the right word.

"...louder than Europe."

Scarlett smiled.

"It is."

Their hotel overlooked Guanabara Bay.

As darkness settled over the city, thousands of lights climbed the surrounding hillsides.

Neither of them unpacked immediately.

Instead they stood on the balcony, watching ships crossing the bay

beneath the silhouette of Sugarloaf Mountain.
Tomorrow the work would begin.
Before sunrise they were already on their way to the airport.
Their destination wasn't Rio.
It was Chapecó, nearly two hours to the south.
From there, a chartered Scarlett Heels coach carried them through the rolling countryside of southern Brazil.
Cities gradually disappeared.
The roads became narrower.
Green hills replaced concrete.
The photographer spent most of the journey staring through the window.
"So this is where we're going?"
One member of the production crew nodded.
"Ametista do Sul."
"The Amethyst Capital."
Violet smiled.
"I've wanted to see this place for years."
The town was surprisingly quiet.
Almost every second shop window displayed polished amethysts.
Small crystal geodes stood beside cafés.
Even street signs carried purple accents.
The entire town seemed to embrace the stone that had made it famous.
Their destination lay just outside the town itself.
The mine.
At first glance, it looked almost disappointingly ordinary.

Rock.

Equipment.

Workers.

Nothing resembling the dreamlike photographs Scarlett had collected.

The photographer looked around.

"This is it?"

Scarlett nodded.

"This is it."

She smiled.

"Now we'll make it unforgettable."

The production crew spent the morning transforming one carefully chosen chamber.

Not the cave.

Only the place the camera would see.

Hidden spotlights disappeared among the crystal formations.

Cables vanished behind basalt columns.

Finally the glossy amethyst-purple floor was assembled.

Only large enough for the photographs.

Nothing more.

Scarlett looked at it.

"Perfect."

The production manager asked,

"Should we make it larger?"

Scarlett shook her head.

"No."

She looked through the camera.

"Only as large as the camera can see."

When the lights came on, the cave awakened.

Thousands of amethyst crystals caught the beams simultaneously.

Every movement produced new reflections.

The photographer slowly lowered her camera.

"I've photographed diamonds."

She looked around once more.

"But never light like this."

Violet stepped onto the polished floor.

For a second she simply stood there.

She looked at the crystal wall.

Then down at the crystal heel she had spent months creating.

The colours matched perfectly.

She smiled.

Scarlett noticed.

"Worth it?"

Violet never took her eyes off the heel.

"Every prototype."

The photographs came surprisingly quickly.

Weeks of preparation...

...and only a few hours behind the camera.

Sometimes Scarlett moved a spotlight by only a few centimetres.

Sometimes she asked the photographer to lower the camera until it almost touched the reflective floor.

The cave became larger.

The crystal wall seemed endless.

Reality remained untouched.

Only the perspective changed.

Late in the afternoon the photographer finally lowered her camera.

"I have it."

Nobody asked to see the photographs.

Scarlett already knew.

The silence in the room was enough.

By evening the temporary floor had disappeared again.

The lights were packed.

The cables removed.

The chamber looked exactly as it had before they arrived.

As if Scarlett Heels had never been there.

Only the photographs would remain.

A short flight carried them back to Rio de Janeiro.

This time there was no schedule waiting.

No production meeting.

Only one final evening.

Scarlett and Violet stood together on the balcony of their hotel suite.

Below them, Guanabara Bay shimmered beneath the setting sun.

Hundreds of boats drifted across the water.

Sugarloaf Mountain rose above the city, exactly as it had on the day they arrived.

Violet rested her arms on the railing.

"I almost wish we had another day."

Scarlett looked across the bay.

"So do I."

For several minutes neither of them spoke.

The city slowly changed from gold...

...to orange...

...to violet.

Finally Scarlett smiled.

"We'll come back."

Violet looked at her.

"For another photo shoot?"

Scarlett shook her head.

"No."

She watched the last sunlight disappear behind the mountains.

"Just to enjoy Brazil."

AMETHYST

*Elegance is never loud.
It is simply unforgettable.*



Created for women who
define their own legacy.
Not for the world.
For themselves.

Amethyst is a tribute to quiet
confidence, timeless beauty,
and the power of subtlety.

Its crystal stiletto heel captures
the mystery of a rare gem—
sculpted to elevate not just
every step, but every presence.

Because some women
don't chase attention.
They leave an impression.



Photographed exclusively
in the Amethyst Cave.

*No noise.
No artificial scenery.
Only crystals.
Only passion.
Only perfection.*



SCARLETT HEELS
— AMETHYST —

Crafted by Hand. Inspired by Women. Timeless by Design.

Chapter 38 - A New Chapter

The Bellamy estate always seemed quieter during summer.

The morning sun filtered through the tall windows of the breakfast room, covering the polished oak table in warm golden light. Outside, gardeners moved silently across the immaculate lawns while a gentle breeze stirred the rose bushes lining the terrace.

Inside, only the delicate sound of porcelain and silverware disturbed the peace.

Mrs. Bellamy folded her newspaper with practised precision before setting it beside her coffee.

Across from her, Bianca was far too excited to sit still.

"I still think they'll surprise everyone."

Mrs. Bellamy looked over the rim of her coffee cup.

"Who?"

"Scarlett Heels."

Bianca buttered another piece of toast while speaking much too quickly.

"Everyone expects another Foundation release this autumn, which is exactly why they won't do it."

Mrs. Bellamy smiled.

"You sound remarkably confident."

"I've studied every collection."

"I know."

"They always do the unexpected."

Mrs. Bellamy raised an eyebrow.

"And your prediction?"

Bianca grinned.

"A completely new Grand design."

"You've said that for the last three collections."

"This time I'm right."

"So you said last time."

Bianca laughed.

"You're impossible."

"So I've been told."

A comfortable silence settled over the table.

The clock in the hallway chimed softly.

Bianca leaned back in her chair.

"I still can't believe school's over."

Mrs. Bellamy nodded.

"It feels strange."

"It does."

"No more exams."

"No."

"No more homework."

"No."

Bianca smiled.

"I don't mind that part."

Mrs. Bellamy laughed quietly.

"I suspected as much."

For a moment neither of them spoke.

Bianca looked through the French doors toward the gardens she had known her entire life.

"So..."

She tilted her head.

"What happens now?"

Mrs. Bellamy did not answer immediately.

Instead, she reached beside her chair.

When she straightened again, she was holding a familiar ruby-red box.

Bianca's eyes grew wide instantly.

"...Mum."

Mrs. Bellamy placed the box on the table.

"Congratulations."

Bianca looked from the box to her mother.

"You didn't."

"I did."

Bianca carefully lifted the lid.

Nestled inside the white silk tissue paper rested a breathtaking pair of Scarlett Heels.

For a moment she simply stared.

Then she looked up again, almost speechless.

"They're beautiful."

"I thought you might like them."

"I love them."

She gently lifted one shoe from the box as though it were a priceless work of art.

The leather caught the morning light with a soft, luxurious sheen.

Bianca smiled like a little girl on Christmas morning.

"This makes..."

She paused.

"...twenty-four."

Mrs. Bellamy nodded.

"Your collection is now complete."

Bianca laughed.

"Oh, I wouldn't go that far."

"No?"

"There will always be another pair."

"I was afraid you might say that."

Bianca stood, walked around the table and hugged her mother tightly.

"Thank you."

Mrs. Bellamy returned the embrace.

"You earned them."

After a long moment Bianca returned to her chair, still unable to stop smiling.

She carefully placed the shoe back into its box.

Something caught her eye.

"There is something underneath."

Mrs. Bellamy said nothing.

Curious, Bianca lifted the remaining layer of tissue paper.

An elegant cream coloured envelope lay beneath it.

The Scarlett Heels crest was embossed in deep ruby red.

Bianca frowned.

"...What's this?"

"Open it."

She carefully broke the seal.

Her eyes scanned the first lines.

Then stopped.

She looked up.

Then back down.

Then up again.

"Mum..."

Her voice had become almost a whisper.

"...is this real?"

"It is."

Bianca read the letter again from the beginning.

She couldn't quite believe what she was seeing.

"This says..."

"I know what it says."

"...it says I'm invited to join Scarlett Heels."

Mrs. Bellamy nodded.

"As an employee."

Another nod.

Bianca stared at the letter as though expecting the words to rearrange themselves.

"You..."

She looked up slowly.

"...you know Scarlett Corvina?"

Mrs. Bellamy smiled.

"Yes."

"You actually know her?"

"I do."

"You never told me."

"You never asked."

Bianca blinked.

"I absolutely would have asked."

Mrs. Bellamy tilted her head.

"My dear..."

A playful smile appeared.

"...you've always been far too busy talking."

Bianca covered her face with both hands.

"...That's probably true."

Mrs. Bellamy waited until Bianca looked up again.

Her expression had become gentler now.

"When I first met Scarlett..."

She paused.

"...she was your age today."

Bianca listened without saying a word.

"She arrived carrying nothing more than a business plan and a dream."

Mrs. Bellamy looked toward the garden, remembering.

"She had visited investor after investor."

"They all said no."

Mrs. Bellamy nodded.

"They believed she was too young."

Bianca looked down at the letter in her hands.

"But you didn't."

"No."

"Why?"

Mrs. Bellamy smiled thoughtfully.

"Because I wasn't looking at her age."

She folded her hands.

"I was looking at her determination."

A quiet silence settled over the room.

"I invested because I believed she would build something extraordinary."

She looked at Bianca.

"I have never regretted that decision."

Bianca smiled softly.

"I don't think anyone else would have done it."

"Perhaps not."

Mrs. Bellamy reached across the table and gently touched the envelope.

"Scarlett has spent years building something very special."

Her smile became warmer.

"And now I believe there is someone she can help shape."

Bianca frowned slightly.

"...What?"

Mrs. Bellamy looked straight into her daughter's bright blue eyes.

"You."

The word seemed to hang in the air.

Bianca stared.

"...Me?"

"I would like you to begin working at Scarlett Heels."

For several heartbeats she could only look at her mother.

Then the meaning finally reached her.

"No..."

A smile slowly spread across her face.

"...Really?"

Mrs. Bellamy nodded.

Bianca jumped to her feet so quickly that her chair scraped loudly across the wooden floor.

"Oh my God!"

Before Mrs. Bellamy could react, Bianca had already hurried around the table and wrapped her arms tightly around her.

Mrs. Bellamy laughed.

"I'll take that as a yes."

"I've dreamed about visiting headquarters for years!"

"I know."

"I know every collection!"

"I know."

"I've watched every interview Scarlett ever gave!"

"I know."

"I can't believe I'm actually going to work there!"

Mrs. Bellamy smiled as she gently brushed a loose strand of blonde hair behind Bianca's ear.

"I thought you might be pleased."

"Pleased?"

Bianca laughed.

"This is the best graduation present ever."

Mrs. Bellamy's smile lingered.

She knew the conversation wasn't over.

Not quite.

There was still one more envelope waiting beside her chair.

Mrs. Bellamy waited until Bianca returned to her seat.

The excitement still sparkled in her daughter's eyes. Every few seconds

Bianca glanced back at the Scarlett Heels letter, as if afraid it might disappear if she looked away for too long.

Mrs. Bellamy smiled.

"I have one more gift."

Bianca laughed.

"Another one?"

"I'm afraid so."

"I'm beginning to like graduation."

Mrs. Bellamy reached beside her chair once more and produced a plain white envelope.

There was no elegant crest.

No luxurious stationery.

Nothing that hinted at what was inside.

Bianca accepted it curiously.

"This one isn't from Scarlett Heels?"

"No."

She opened the envelope.

A plastic membership card slid onto the table.

Bianca picked it up.

She turned it over once.

Then twice.

Her smile slowly dissolved into puzzled confusion.

"A fitness studio?"

"Yes."

Bianca looked up.

"I think they mixed up the envelopes."

Mrs. Bellamy shook her head.

"They didn't."

Bianca looked at the card again.

"...You're serious."

"I am."

A long silence followed.

Finally Bianca looked back at her mother.

"But..."

She searched for the right words.

"...why?"

Mrs. Bellamy folded her hands.

"You begin there on Monday morning."

"And Scarlett Heels?"

"The following week."

Bianca nodded slowly.

"I've never even been inside a gym."

"I know."

"I don't know how any of those machines work."

"You'll learn."

"I don't even own sports clothes."

Mrs. Bellamy smiled.

"I anticipated that problem."

Bianca narrowed her eyes.

"You already bought them."

"I may have."

"Mum..."

"They're in your wardrobe."

Bianca laughed despite herself.

"You planned all of this."

"For quite some time."

She leaned back in her chair.

"I thought we were going to spend today celebrating."

"We are."

"This doesn't feel like celebrating."

Mrs. Bellamy tilted her head.

"No?"

"It feels like..."

Bianca searched for the right word.

"...growing up."

Mrs. Bellamy's expression softened.

"Yes."

Neither of them spoke for several moments.

Outside, the breeze stirred the branches of an old oak tree.

Somewhere in the distance, birds were singing.

Mrs. Bellamy broke the silence.

"You've had a wonderful childhood."

Bianca smiled.

"I know."

"I wanted you to have one."

"You succeeded."

Mrs. Bellamy looked at her daughter with quiet affection.

"But childhood has a habit of ending."

Bianca looked down at the membership card resting beside the Scarlett Heels letter.

"I suppose it does."

"I could send you straight to Scarlett."

"You could."

"But I won't."

Bianca looked up again.

"Why not?"

"Because Scarlett will teach you how to become part of an extraordinary company."

Mrs. Bellamy gently tapped the membership card.

"But before that..."

She paused.

"...I want you to discover something else."

Bianca waited.

"I want you to discover what you're capable of."

Bianca smiled uncertainly.

"I'm not exactly athletic."

"I didn't ask you to become an athlete."

"No?"

Mrs. Bellamy shook her head.

"I asked you to become stronger."

"I can do that at Scarlett Heels."

"In some ways."

"And the gym?"

"In different ways."

Bianca slowly nodded.

"I still think I'm going to embarrass myself."

Mrs. Bellamy laughed softly.

"You probably will."

"Mum."

"So will everyone else."

Bianca looked unconvinced.

Mrs. Bellamy continued.

"The first time anyone learns something new, they look awkward."

"I'll look spectacularly awkward."

"Perhaps."

Bianca sighed dramatically.

"I knew there had to be a catch."

Mrs. Bellamy smiled.

"The catch is that you'll survive."

That earned another laugh.

Mrs. Bellamy's smile slowly faded into something more thoughtful.

"There is another reason."

Bianca became serious.

"What is it?"

Mrs. Bellamy looked out through the tall windows before answering.

"When you were little..."

She smiled to herself.

"...you believed everyone was kind."

Bianca nodded.

"I remember."

"I never wanted to take that belief away from you."

She looked back at her daughter.

"But the world is more complicated than that."

Bianca listened quietly.

"You'll meet wonderful people."

A brief pause.

"You'll also meet people who disappoint you."

Mrs. Bellamy's voice remained calm.

"I cannot choose whom you meet."

Another pause.

"But I can choose where your journey begins."

Bianca looked from one envelope to the other.

"So you chose Scarlett Heels..."

"Yes."

"...and the fitness studio."

"Yes."

Mrs. Bellamy smiled.

"I want your life to begin surrounded by capable women."

The sentence lingered in the room.

Bianca looked thoughtful.

"I never imagined today would turn out like this."

"Neither did Scarlett."

Bianca looked up.

"What do you mean?"

Mrs. Bellamy smiled.

"When I invested in a determined eighteen-year-old with a dream..."

She looked at Bianca with unmistakable affection.

"...I never imagined that one day I'd be sending my own daughter to work beside her."

Bianca smiled.

"I hope she's not disappointed."

Mrs. Bellamy laughed.

"I rather suspect Scarlett will like you."

"You do?"

"I do."

Bianca tilted her head.

"Why?"

"Because you're interested in people before you're interested in yourself."

Bianca thought about that.

"I've never really noticed."

"I know."

Mrs. Bellamy reached across the table and gently squeezed her daughter's hand.

"Don't ever lose that."

For a long moment neither of them spoke.

The breakfast dishes had long since grown cold.

The morning sun had climbed higher into the sky.

Everything outside looked exactly as it had an hour earlier.

Inside, everything had changed.

Bianca carefully placed both envelopes back into the Scarlett Heels box.

The shoes rested beneath them like the beginning of a promise.

Mrs. Bellamy stood.

"So..."

Bianca looked up.

"...what happens now?"

Mrs. Bellamy smiled.

"Now we finish breakfast."

Bianca laughed.

"And tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow..."

Mrs. Bellamy walked around the table and kissed her gently on the forehead.

"...the next chapter of your life begins."

Bianca carried the ruby-red box upstairs with both hands.

Halfway to her room she stopped, looked down at it and smiled.

A pair of beautiful shoes.

A letter from Scarlett Heels.

A membership card for a fitness studio.

Three gifts.

She had no way of knowing that, years later, she would remember that ordinary summer morning as the day her entire life quietly changed.

Not because of the shoes.

But because of the people she was about to meet.

Chapter 39 - First Steps

Monday arrived far sooner than Bianca would have liked.

She stood in front of the full-length mirror in her bedroom, dressed in brand-new sportswear that still smelled faintly of fresh fabric and unopened packaging.

She tugged lightly at the hem of her white training top.

"I look like I'm pretending."

The mirror offered no opinion.

Her mother, however, did.

"You look exactly like someone going to a fitness studio for the first time."

Bianca turned.

Mrs. Bellamy stood in the doorway, carrying two mugs of coffee.

"I feel ridiculous."

"I expected that."

"You did?"

Mrs. Bellamy handed her one of the mugs.

"Everyone feels ridiculous on their first day."

Bianca looked down at herself again.

"I've never worn leggings before."

Mrs. Bellamy smiled.

"I noticed."

"They're surprisingly comfortable."

"So I've heard."

Bianca laughed.

"I still think this is your revenge."

"For what?"

"For buying twenty-three pairs of Scarlett Heels."

"Twenty-four."

Bianca smiled.

"Right."

Mrs. Bellamy looked at her daughter for a long moment.

"You'll do fine."

"I've never even touched a gym machine."

"Neither had everyone else."

Bianca nodded slowly.

"I suppose that's true."

Mrs. Bellamy kissed her lightly on the cheek.

"Call me this evening."

"I will."

"And remember..."

Bianca looked back.

"...everyone started somewhere."

The fitness studio was much larger than Bianca had imagined.

Bright daylight streamed through enormous windows overlooking a

small park. Rows of treadmills faced the glass while the rhythmic clinking of weights mixed with soft music and quiet conversations.

People seemed to know exactly where they were going.

Bianca did not.

She stood just inside the entrance, clutching her membership card.

A cheerful receptionist looked up.

"Good morning."

"Good morning."

"First day?"

"...Is it that obvious?"

The receptionist smiled.

"Only because you're still holding the membership card instead of putting it in your bag."

Bianca laughed and looked down.

"Oh."

She had.

"Welcome."

The receptionist pointed toward a seating area.

"One of our trainers will be with you in just a moment."

"Thank you."

Bianca had barely taken three steps before a friendly voice called after her.

"Excuse me."

She turned.

A tall trainer with a welcoming smile approached.

"First day?"

"Yes."

"I'm Daniel."

He extended his hand.

"I'll show you around."

Before Bianca could answer, another trainer appeared from the opposite direction.

"I think reception assigned her to me."

Daniel frowned.

"They didn't."

"They usually do."

"They didn't."

The second trainer smiled at Bianca.

"I'm Chris."

Bianca smiled politely.

"Hello."

Daniel spoke first.

"We'll start with a short tour."

Chris interrupted.

"Actually, I have a free appointment right now."

Daniel folded his arms.

"So do I."

Bianca looked from one trainer to the other.

"...Um..."

She had no idea what to say.

Both men were perfectly friendly.

Both were smiling.

Neither seemed willing to step aside.

She searched desperately for the one sentence that would make everyone happy.

Nothing came to mind.

A calm voice interrupted the moment.

"She's with me."

The words weren't loud.

They didn't need to be.

The two trainers turned immediately.

A woman dressed entirely in black stood several metres away beside a seated client finishing an exercise.

Dark ponytail.

Perfect posture.

Completely composed.

One trainer frowned.

"Since when?"

"Since now."

Her tone remained calm.

Matter-of-fact.

As though no further explanation could possibly be necessary.

The trainers exchanged a glance.

Daniel sighed.

"Fine."

Chris shrugged.

"Your client."

Neither sounded offended.

Just... unsurprised.

They walked away.

Only then did the woman look directly at Bianca.

"First day?"

Bianca nodded.

"...Yes."

"I'll be with you in five minutes."

She gestured toward a nearby seating area.

"You can wait there."

"Of course."

Bianca sat down.

For the first time since entering the building, nobody expected anything from her.

She exhaled quietly.

Then she looked toward the woman who had rescued her.

The client Naomi was coaching appeared to be in her fifties.

Every movement looked difficult.

Naomi never hurried her.

She demonstrated the exercise once.

Adjusted the woman's posture with the lightest touch.

Waited.

Encouraged.

Never rushed.

When the woman finally completed the movement correctly, Naomi simply nodded.

"Excellent."

The smile on the client's face suggested those single words meant more than a paragraph of praise.

"Same time on Wednesday?"

"I wouldn't miss it."

Naomi smiled.

"I'll see you then."

The woman left looking noticeably happier than she had arrived.

Only then did Naomi walk toward Bianca.

"I'm Naomi."

"Bianca."

Naomi nodded once.

"Come with me."

No unnecessary small talk.

No sales pitch.

Just quiet certainty.

Bianca followed.

Naomi adjusted the seat of the first machine.

"Sit."

Bianca did.

"Feet here."

She tried.

"A little wider."

She moved them.

"No..."

Naomi gently nudged one foot a few centimetres.

"...there."

"Like this?"

"Almost."

Bianca pushed.

Nothing happened.

She looked confused.

"I think it's broken."

Naomi glanced at the side of the machine.

"You forgot the pin."

Bianca blinked.

"...Oh."

She inserted it.

"That might help."

"It usually does."

Bianca pushed again.

The machine moved.

A little too enthusiastically.

She nearly laughed at herself.

"Too much?"

"Too much."

Naomi reduced the weight.

"Again."

This time the movement looked better.

Not good.

But better.

Naomi demonstrated it once herself.

Every motion looked effortless.

Precise.

Controlled.

Bianca immediately tried to imitate her.

For exactly three seconds.

Then one knee drifted inward.

One shoulder rose.

Her balance disappeared.

The movement turned into what could only be described as a very determined misunderstanding of human anatomy.

She stopped.

Very slowly she turned toward Naomi.

"...That was terrible, wasn't it?"

Naomi looked at her.

Bianca looked back.

For a heartbeat neither of them spoke.

Then Bianca's lips twitched.

Naomi's did too.

Without warning, both of them began to giggle.

It wasn't loud.

It wasn't long.

Just a few quiet seconds that neither of them had expected.

Across the room, the receptionist looked up.

Daniel paused in the middle of explaining an exercise.

Chris lowered the dumbbell he had been carrying.

All three had the same thought.

Naomi just laughed.

The receptionist smiled to herself.

She had worked there for almost four years.

She could count on one hand the number of times she had heard

Naomi laugh.

Meanwhile, Bianca wiped a tear from the corner of her eye.

"I'm sorry."

Naomi shook her head.

"So am I."

That only made Bianca giggle again.

Naomi waited until they had both regained their composure.

Then she picked up Bianca's water bottle and handed it to her.

"You know..."

Bianca accepted it.

"...most people worry about looking foolish."

"I did."

"You still tried."

Bianca looked at the machine.

"I wasn't very successful."

"That's not the point."

Bianca looked back at Naomi.

"No?"

Naomi shook her head.

"You laughed."

Bianca nodded.

"Mostly because I looked ridiculous."

Naomi looked at her for a moment.

"Most people apologize when that happens."

"...I did apologize."

"Yes."

"..."

"Then you laughed anyway."

A pause.

"Don't lose that."

Bianca blinked.

"Lose what?"

"Your ability to laugh at yourself."

When she left the fitness studio an hour later, she turned around and waved cheerfully.

Naomi had already begun helping another client.

She noticed the movement from across the room.

For the briefest moment...

...she raised her own hand and waved back.

It was such a small gesture that Bianca barely noticed it.

The receptionist did.

She smiled to herself.

Something about today had been different.

She couldn't have explained what.

She only knew one thing with absolute certainty.

Naomi had laughed.

Chapter 40 - Floor Forty-Two

Bianca checked her reflection one last time in the polished steel doors of the elevator.

"You can do this."

The doors opened with a soft chime.

A discreet number on the wall greeted her.

42

She smiled.

"For some reason that feels reassuring."

The reception area beyond was unlike any office she had ever imagined.

Floor-to-ceiling windows flooded the room with natural light.

Dark walnut wood, brushed brass and soft ivory tones created an atmosphere that felt elegant without trying to impress. Every detail had been considered. Nothing shouted for attention.

It didn't have to.

A single Scarlett Heel stood beneath a glass spotlight at the center of the reception area.

Not as merchandise.

As art.

Bianca walked toward the reception desk.

The receptionist looked up immediately.

Her smile was warm rather than rehearsed.

"You must be Bianca Bellamy."

Bianca blinked.

"...Yes."

"Welcome to Scarlett Heels."

"Thank you."

"We've been expecting you."

Those four words somehow made Bianca even more nervous.

The receptionist stood.

"I'm Emma."

She offered her hand.

"I'm going to show you around before Scarlett is ready."

"She's in a meeting?"

Emma nodded.

"She always finishes with the person she's already with."

For some reason, that reminded Bianca of Naomi.

She smiled to herself.

"I don't mind waiting."

"I didn't think you would."

The office wasn't large.

It occupied only one floor of the high-rise, yet it somehow felt like an entire world.

Women worked behind elegant glass partitions.

One office handled accounting.

Another coordinated suppliers and international deliveries.

Nearby, customer consultants spoke softly with clients from around the world.

Further along, several employees were discussing logistics around a large digital planning table.

Nobody hurried.

Nobody raised their voice.

People greeted one another with genuine smiles.

The atmosphere wasn't tense.

It was... peaceful.

Emma noticed Bianca looking around.

"It's quieter than most people expect."

"It is."

"We discovered that beautiful things are easier to create in a calm environment."

Bianca nodded.

"I like that."

"So do we."

They continued walking.

Emma stopped before another glass door.

"Our IT department."

Inside, several large monitors covered one wall.

Diagrams, production schedules and software dashboards filled the screens.

At the far end of the room stood a woman with long dark hair streaked with vivid violet.

She was studying several displays at once.

One hand rested thoughtfully beneath her chin while the other moved confidently across a digital tablet.

She didn't notice them.

Emma smiled.

"That's Violet."

Without taking her eyes off the screens, Violet lifted one hand in a brief greeting.

"Morning."

"Morning," Emma replied.

"This is Bianca."

Violet gave the slightest nod.

"Hi."

Then she immediately returned to whatever problem occupied her attention.

Bianca blinked.

"...She's busy."

Emma smiled.

"Very."

They quietly continued walking.

"I hope I didn't interrupt."

"You didn't."

"She didn't even look at me."

Emma laughed softly.

"That's usually a good sign."

"It is?"

"If Violet disappears into her work..."

Emma smiled knowingly.

"...our systems usually become a little smarter by the end of the day."

Bianca glanced back through the glass wall.

Violet hadn't moved.

She seemed completely unaware that anyone had entered the room.

"I think I understand."

Emma nodded.

"Scarlett designs the shoes."

"And Violet?"

"She designs almost everything you don't notice."

Bianca looked puzzled.

"The software."

"The planning."

"The production systems."

Emma smiled.

"If everything here works perfectly..."

"...it's probably because Violet has been quietly thinking about it for weeks."

Bianca looked back one last time.

She still hadn't managed to catch Violet looking away from her screens.

They returned to the reception area a few minutes later.

Emma glanced toward Scarlett's office.

"The meeting is just finishing."

"I'll wait."

"Of course."

Bianca wandered toward the display in the center of the room.

It was the newest Foundation model.
She recognised it instantly.
She had admired photographs of it for months.
In person...
...it was somehow even more beautiful.
She told herself not to touch it.
She lasted exactly four seconds.
Very carefully...
...using only the tip of one finger...
...she let it glide across the impossibly smooth leather.
"So..."
A warm voice behind her.
"...what do you think?"
Bianca froze.
Her heart seemed to stop.
Very slowly she turned around.
Scarlett Corvina stood a few steps away.
Ruby-red blazer.
Matching skirt.
Long dark-red hair.
Emerald-green eyes.
She looked exactly like the photographs.
Only warmer.
Much warmer.
Bianca immediately pulled her hand away.
"Oh..."

"I'm terribly sorry."

"I shouldn't have touched it."

Scarlett walked toward the display.

For a moment she looked at the shoe.

Then at Bianca.

"Beautiful, isn't it?"

Bianca nodded.

"I've admired Scarlett Heels for years."

"I can tell."

"I just..."

She searched helplessly for the right words.

"...I wanted to know what it felt like."

Scarlett smiled.

Then, to Bianca's complete surprise, she gently rested her own fingertips on the leather.

"Go ahead."

Bianca blinked.

"...Really?"

Scarlett nodded.

"Shoes aren't created to spend their lives behind glass."

A small smile appeared.

"They're created to be admired."

Slowly, Bianca touched the shoe once more.

This time without guilt.

"It feels..."

She searched for the perfect word.

"...perfect."

Scarlett laughed softly.

"That's exactly what we hope people will say."

For a brief moment neither of them spoke.

Then Scarlett extended her hand.

"I'm Scarlett."

Bianca stared at it for the briefest instant.

As though part of her still couldn't believe this was actually happening.

Then she shook it.

"I'm Bianca."

Scarlett smiled.

"I know."

She held Bianca's hand for just a moment longer.

"Welcome to Scarlett Heels."

The nervousness Bianca had carried all morning quietly disappeared.

Scarlett noticed.

"Would you like to see my office?"

Bianca laughed nervously.

"I've wanted to see it for years."

"Then we'd better not disappoint you."

Scarlett opened the office door herself.

She stepped aside.

"After you."

Bianca hesitated.

"Shouldn't you..."

Scarlett smiled.

"Today you're my guest."

Bianca walked through the doorway.

She never noticed Emma watching from the reception desk.

Emma smiled to herself.

Every newcomer arrived nervous.

Almost all of them left Scarlett's office smiling.

Scarlett had a remarkable gift.

She never made people feel as though they had entered her world.

She made them feel they had always belonged in it.

Chapter 41 - Snowflake

The conference room was unusually quiet.

On the large screen, a single image appeared.

A white silhouette.

Elegant.

Graceful.

Unlike anything Scarlett Heels had produced before.

Scarlett looked around the table.

"This," she said, "is Snowflake."

The room remained silent for a few seconds.

Naomi leaned forward.

"It almost disappears."

Scarlett smiled.

"Exactly."

Violet was already studying the technical drawings.

"One hundred and forty millimetres?"

She raised an eyebrow.

"With a concealed platform."

Scarlett nodded.

"The pitch remains comfortable."

Violet was no longer looking at the overall design.

She was examining tiny details.

"The heel counter..."

"It has six scallops."

"They represent the symmetry of a snowflake."

Scarlett nodded again.

"You noticed."

Bianca had barely said a word.

She simply admired the shoe.

"It's beautiful..."

Scarlett looked at her.

"It is."

Then she closed the presentation.

"And you'll be wearing it."

Bianca's eyes lit up.

"Really?"

Scarlett smiled.

"Yes."

Bianca jumped to her feet.

"Oh my God!"

She clapped her hands together and laughed.

"Seriously?"

Scarlett nodded.

"I don't need another supermodel."

"I need Bianca."

Bianca hurried around the table and hugged Scarlett.

"I won't let you down."

"I know," Scarlett replied.

Two weeks later...

Nuuk.

The aircraft door opened.

An icy wind swept inside.

Bianca took one step onto the stairs.

"...It's freezing!"

The rest of the team burst into laughter.

"It's summer!" Bianca called back, shivering dramatically.

"Whose summer?" Naomi grinned.

Before Bianca reached the bottom of the stairs, two assistants hurried over and wrapped thick wool blankets around her shoulders.

"Thank you," Bianca laughed through chattering teeth.

"I suddenly love central heating."

The journalists were already taking photographs.

Not of the campaign.

Of Bianca, smiling beneath layers of oversized wool blankets in the middle of an Arctic summer.

The next morning they lifted off before sunrise.

The helicopter climbed above dark mountains before endless white appeared on the horizon.

A glacier.

Not a tourist attraction.

A world of silence.

Only wind.

Ice.

And sunlight.

The helicopter landed carefully.

The crew immediately went to work.

Reflectors.

Camera equipment.

Drone operators.

Stylists.

Hair and makeup artists.

Safety guides.

Every movement had been rehearsed.

The glacier was magnificent.

And unforgiving.

Bianca stepped onto the ice.

White Snowflake heels.

A short white Scarlett Heels dress.

Blonde hair moving gently in the Arctic wind.

For a moment everyone simply watched.

One of the journalists quietly lowered his camera.

"It doesn't even look real."

The photographer raised his hand.

"Ready."

The first shutter click echoed across the glacier.

Then another.

Then another.

The blue ice reflected into the glossy white leather.

Every photograph looked as though the shoes had been carved from the glacier itself.

Between takes Bianca disappeared beneath her warm blanket again while the crew adjusted lights and cameras.

Someone handed around steaming mugs of hot chocolate.

The makeup artist hurried over after every gust of wind.

Scarlett remained calm, making only small adjustments.

"A little more to the left."

"Lift your chin."

"Perfect."

Late in the afternoon the photographer finally lowered his camera.

"We've got it."

Nobody applauded.

Nobody needed to.

They all knew.

They had created something extraordinary.

Six weeks later...

The magazines arrived.

Across double-page spreads, Bianca stood alone on an endless Greenland glacier wearing Snowflake.

The headlines were impossible to miss.

**THE COLDEST FASHION SHOOT ON EARTH
SCARLETT HEELS TAKES LUXURY TO GREENLAND
WHEN CRAFTSMANSHIP MEETS THE ARCTIC**

Readers admired the photographs.

The journalists remembered the experience.

And Bianca had become the face of Snowflake.

SNOWFLAKE

The New Winter Icon

Created for women who
never follow footprints.

Only leave them.

Snowflake is a celebration of purity,
craftsmanship, and fearless elegance.

Its luminous pearl-white silhouette
rises on a breathtaking 140 mm stiletto,
balanced by a concealed platform that
transforms extraordinary height into
effortless grace.

A hand-set crystal snowflake adorns
the sculpted heel counter.

Six subtle scallops echo the perfect
symmetry found only in nature.

Hidden beneath every step, an intricate
frost pattern unfolds across the white
sole before revealing Scarlett's own
signature, embossed into the
leather itself—a detail intended
not for everyone, but for those who
choose to look closer.



Photographed exclusively
on the glaciers of Greenland.

No studio.

No artificial scenery.

Only light.

Only ice.

Only perfection.



SCARLETT HEELS

—+ SNOWFLAKE —+

Crafted by Hand. Inspired by Winter.

Chapter 43 - The Heart of Scarlett Heels

Summer quietly became autumn.

Bianca never noticed exactly when it happened.

One morning the trees outside the headquarters still wore deep green leaves.

A few weeks later, golden colours reflected in the floor-to-ceiling windows on the forty-second floor.

Life had simply... settled.

Every weekday began almost the same.

"Good morning, Emma."

"Good morning, Bianca."

Emma and Bianca hugged.

She no longer asked whether Bianca wanted coffee.

She simply placed Bianca's favourite cup on the reception desk before Bianca even reached it.

"Thank you."

"I know."

Bianca laughed.

"You really do."

Emma leaned forward.

"You smile before your first sip."

"I do?"

"Every morning."

Bianca accepted the cup.

"I'll have to pay more attention."

"No."

Emma smiled.

"Please don't."

The headquarters slowly developed a new rhythm.

People still worked with the same precision.

Meetings still started on time.

Deadlines were still met.

Yet something had undeniably changed.

Laughter travelled through the corridors more often.

Birthdays became little celebrations.

Someone always remembered fresh flowers.

Someone else started bringing homemade biscuits on Fridays.

Nobody could quite explain when these things had started.

Everyone knew who had started them.

Bianca.

She somehow remembered everything.

Who preferred tea instead of coffee.

Whose daughter had just started school.

Whose husband was recovering from surgery.

Who secretly loved strawberry cake.

Who had once mentioned wanting to visit Iceland.

Weeks later Bianca would casually ask,

"So... have you booked that trip yet?"

People stared.

"...You remembered?"

Bianca always looked surprised.

"Of course."

To Bianca, remembering people wasn't a talent.

It was simply what you did when they mattered.

Scarlett noticed.

Not immediately.

Gradually.

She walked through the office one afternoon and realised something unusual.

Nobody looked relieved when the working day ended.

Nobody was watching the clock.

People simply...

...liked being there.

She stood quietly beside Emma.

"When did that happen?"

Emma smiled.

"I think..."

She glanced toward Bianca, who was enthusiastically helping someone

carry three enormous folders that probably weighed more than she did.

"...around the time she arrived."

Scarlett followed her gaze.

Bianca laughed as one folder nearly slid from her arms.

Someone rescued it.

Both of them laughed.

Scarlett smiled.

"So that's her gift."

Emma nodded.

"I think so."

Not everyone agreed.

Violet closed another spreadsheet.

Adjusted her glasses.

Opened a second spreadsheet.

Compared two graphs.

Compared them again.

Finally she frowned.

"This makes no sense."

She stood and walked into Scarlett's office.

Scarlett looked up.

"Morning, Violet."

"Morning."

A short silence.

"I believe Bianca is reducing productivity."

Scarlett folded her hands.

"Is she?"

"Employees spend significantly more time talking."

"I see."

"They also laugh more frequently."

Scarlett nodded thoughtfully.

"That sounds terrible."

Violet completely missed the irony.

"It may become a problem."

Scarlett smiled.

"Have you checked the numbers?"

"I have."

"And?"

Another pause.

"...Productivity is unchanged."

Scarlett waited.

Violet looked down at her tablet.

"In several departments..."

She frowned.

"...it has increased slightly."

Scarlett leaned back.

"What do you think?"

"I think..."

A long pause.

"...my data is wrong."

Scarlett laughed.

"I doubt that."

Violet left unconvinced.

The following week she expanded the analysis.

Coffee breaks.

Project completion times.

Error rates.

Software development.

Customer satisfaction.

Every graph told exactly the same story.

People talked more.

People smiled more.

People hugged.

The company performed just as well.

Or slightly better.

Violet stared at the monitor.

"...Impossible."

The hugs had started almost by accident.

Bianca hugged Emma one morning because Emma had remembered her favourite coffee.

Emma laughed.

The next morning she hugged Bianca first.

A week later people hugged each other without thinking about it.

It simply became the morning greeting.

Except for one person.

Violet.

Not because Bianca avoided her.

Because Violet always arrived before everyone else.

And almost always left after everyone else.

Their schedules never seemed to meet.

Until one Thursday afternoon.

Bianca noticed the light was still on in the IT department.

She looked inside.

Violet hadn't moved for almost an hour.

Three monitors surrounded her.

Lines of code filled every screen.

A notebook lay open beside the keyboard.

The page was covered in arrows, diagrams and equations.

Bianca knocked gently on the glass.

No reaction.

She knocked again.

Violet looked up.

"...Oh."

"You missed lunch."

"I know."

"You've been sitting here for hours."

"I know."

"You look tired."

"I know."

Bianca smiled.

"You need a Power Hug."

Violet blinked.

"...A what?"

"A Power Hug."

"I don't."

"You do."

"I assure you..."

Violet turned back toward the monitor.

"...I do not."

Bianca walked around the desk.

Violet sensed movement.

She looked up again.

"...Bianca."

"Mhm?"

"Don't."

Too late.

Bianca wrapped both arms around her.

Not politely.

Not gently.

Like someone who had recently discovered she was much stronger than she looked.

Violet blinked.

"...Bianca."

"Mhm?"

"I have work to do."

"Prrrrrrrr..."

Silence.

"Prrrrrrrr..."

Violet stared.

"...Are you..."

"Prrrrrrrr..."

"...purring?"

Bianca nodded happily.

"There is absolutely no scientific evidence..."

"Prrrrrrrr..."

Violet sighed.

She tried to pull away.

Nothing.

She frowned.

"...How did you get so strong?"

"Prrrrrrrr..."

No answer.

Only another contented purr.

Violet made one final attempt.

Completely pointless.

She stopped.

Very slowly...

...her shoulders relaxed.

The office around her disappeared.

Bianca had a faint scent of vanilla.

The unfinished software disappeared.

The impossible problem quietly drifted into the background.

Instead...

...memories appeared.

The first production system she had ever built for Scarlett.

The excitement of seeing it work.

Scarlett's smile.

The day Scarlett had quietly said,

"I couldn't have done this without you."

Then another memory.

Emma insisting everyone celebrate a birthday.

Bianca laughing.

Someone bringing cake.

The office smiling together.

A tiny smile appeared on Violet's face.

This was absurd.

Another memory drifted past.

Without thinking...

Violet very quietly...

"...Prr..."

Nothing.

She frowned.

Tried again.

"...Prrrr..."

It sounded so utterly ridiculous that she began laughing.

Really laughing.

Bianca laughed too.

Still hugging her.

Still purring contentedly.

And then—

Everything clicked.

The architecture of the software rearranged itself inside Violet's mind.

One connection.

Another.

The missing dependency.

The answer.

Her eyes flew open.

"...Oh."

Bianca tilted her head.

"What?"

"I know."

Without another word Violet gently stepped out of the hug, hurried to her workstation and sat down.

Her fingers danced across the keyboard.

One change.

Another.

Compile.

The progress bar moved.

A second passed.

Then another.

No errors.

No warnings.

Everything worked.

Silence.

Violet stared at the screen.

Then she slowly stood.

She walked out of the IT department.

Across the open office.

People noticed.

Nobody spoke.

Bianca looked up from her desk.

"Hi, Violet."

Violet stopped in front of her.

For just a moment she looked uncertain.

Then...

Without a word...

...she stepped forward and wrapped both arms around Bianca.

Not a polite hug.

A real one.

The entire office froze.

Emma's mouth fell open.

Someone in accounting whispered,

"...Did anyone else just see that?"

Scarlett looked up from her office.

A smile spread across her face.

Bianca hugged Violet back immediately.

"Prrrrrrrr..."

This time...

Violet smiled.

She didn't even try to resist.

Very softly, so quietly that only Bianca could hear, she whispered,

"...Thank you... Bibé"

Bianca squeezed her just a little tighter.

"Anytime."

No one said a word for several seconds after Violet returned to the IT department.

Finally Emma looked toward Scarlett.

Scarlett simply smiled.

"I believe," she said quietly,

"our company just became a little stronger."

Outside, autumn leaves drifted past the windows of the forty-second floor.

Inside...

Scarlett Heels had quietly found its heart.

Chapter 44 - Tuesday Evenings

By October, Tuesday and Thursday evenings had quietly settled into a routine.

Bianca finished work shortly after five.

She caught the underground two stations across the city.

And, almost without thinking about it any more, walked through the familiar glass doors of the fitness studio.

"Good evening."

The receptionist smiled.

"Hi, Bianca."

No membership card any more.

No nervousness.

No wondering where to go.

It had simply become...

...normal.

Naomi looked up from helping another client.

"Evening."

"Hi."

That was all.

Yet somehow Bianca always felt strangely pleased whenever Naomi greeted her first.

Training had become easier.

Not easy.

Just...

less embarrassing.

Bianca no longer forgot the pins.

She knew the machines.

She even recognised most of the regular members.

Daniel passed her while carrying a stack of exercise mats.

"You're getting stronger."

Bianca grinned.

"I noticed."

"You also stopped looking terrified."

"I noticed that too."

He laughed.

"Naomi's doing good work."

Bianca glanced across the room.

Naomi was explaining an exercise to an elderly gentleman with exactly the same patience she had shown Bianca on her first day.

"I know."

An hour later Bianca wiped her forehead with a towel.

"I think that's enough suffering for today."

Naomi almost smiled.

"It wasn't suffering."

"No?"

"No."

Bianca laughed.

"Then my legs have a very vivid imagination."

Naomi actually smiled this time.

"They'll recover."

"I sincerely hope so."

The gym slowly emptied.

Music became quieter.

Machines fell silent one after another.

Outside, the city lights reflected in the windows.

Naomi locked away a set of dumbbells.

Bianca finished tying her shoes.

"You closing?"

Naomi nodded.

"In about five minutes."

"I'll wait."

Naomi looked up.

"You don't have to."

"I know."

Bianca shrugged.

"It's nicer walking out together."

Naomi hesitated.

"...Okay."

They stepped outside.

The evening air felt cool after the warmth of the gym.

For a while they simply walked.

Cars passed.

Someone laughed somewhere across the street.

Neither of them seemed in a hurry to break the silence.

Finally Naomi gathered all her courage.

"Dinner tonight?"

Bianca stopped walking.

"Now?"

Naomi immediately looked slightly uncertain.

"...If you're free."

Bianca looked at her for perhaps half a second.

Then she smiled.

"Why not? I'm hungry."

Naomi couldn't help laughing.

"So am I."

They found a small Italian restaurant only a few streets away.

Nothing fancy.

Just warm light.

Wooden tables.

The smell of fresh bread.

Bianca studied the menu.

"I could eat everything."

Naomi looked at her over the top of the menu.

"I believe you."

"I burned at least three thousand calories."

"It was closer to three hundred."

"...Details."

Dinner lasted almost two hours.

Mostly because Bianca talked.

She talked about Scarlett Heels.

About Emma.

About Violet.

About how she was still convinced Scarlett somehow managed to make every room feel calmer simply by walking into it.

Naomi listened.

Occasionally asking a question.

Mostly smiling.

"You really love working there."

"I do."

Bianca didn't hesitate.

"It doesn't feel like a company."

"What does it feel like?"

She thought about it.

"...Home."

Naomi nodded.

"I know that feeling."

"You do?"

Naomi smiled.

"The gym."

Bianca looked around the restaurant.

"I suppose we both found our places."

"I suppose we did."

Dessert somehow appeared on the table even though neither of them remembered ordering it.

Bianca laughed.

"I blame you."

Naomi looked puzzled.

"Why me?"

"You looked at the chocolate cake."

"I did."

"So naturally we had to order it."

"We?"

"We."

Naomi laughed softly.

"Fair enough."

When they finally stepped back onto the street, the city had become quiet.

Bianca stretched happily.

"That was lovely."

Naomi smiled.

"I'm glad."

Bianca looked at her.

"You know..."

Naomi waited.

"...we're becoming such good friends."

Naomi's smile remained exactly the same.

"Yes."

Bianca linked her arm through Naomi's without thinking.

"Next time you can choose the restaurant."

Naomi looked down at Bianca's arm resting comfortably against hers.

"...I'd like that."

They walked another block before reaching the underground station.

Bianca hugged Naomi.

Completely naturally.

Exactly the same way she hugged everyone she cared about.

"See you Thursday."

Naomi returned the hug.

"See you Thursday."

Bianca disappeared down the station steps.

Still smiling.

Naomi remained where she was.

Watching until Bianca was out of sight.

Only then did she quietly laugh to herself.

One elderly gentleman waiting for the pedestrian light glanced at her with an amused smile.

"Good evening?"

Naomi blinked, suddenly realising she was standing alone on the

pavement smiling at absolutely nothing.

She smiled back.

"It certainly is."

She continued walking home.

The evening felt lighter than it had any right to.

She had no idea whether Bianca thought it had been a date.

She suspected not.

Oddly enough...

...that didn't matter.

For now...

...having dinner with Bianca had been enough.

And Bianca suggested repeating it.

Chapter 45 - A New Home

By November, nobody could quite remember when Scarlett Heels had changed.

It simply...

...had.

Every morning began almost exactly the same.

The elevator doors opened.

Bianca stepped into the reception area.

Emma looked up.

Without saying a word she opened one arm.

Bianca laughed.

"Hug?"

"Always."

From somewhere deeper inside the office came a perfectly familiar voice.

Violet.

Bianca looked up immediately.

"Morning, Bibé."

"Morning, Violet."

Violet crossed the reception area without breaking stride.

She stopped for exactly one second.

Wrapped one arm around Bianca.

Accepted her Power Hug.

"...Prrrr."

It sounded wonderfully unconvincing.

Bianca beamed.

"You're getting better."

"I refuse to discuss it."

She continued toward the IT department.

Emma watched her disappear.

"...She purred."

"I know."

"...Voluntarily."

"I know."

Both women started laughing.

The office came to life.

People arrived.

Coats disappeared.

Coffee machines hummed.

Morning hugs happened almost automatically.

Nobody announced them.

Nobody questioned them.

It had simply become the way Scarlett Heels said good morning.

Scarlett stepped out of her office carrying a folder.

Someone greeted her.

Someone else asked a question.

Bianca smiled.

"Good morning, Scarlett."

"Good morning, Bianca."

Bianca hesitated for the briefest moment.

"...May I?"

Scarlett smiled.

"I was wondering how long it would take."

Bianca laughed and hugged her.

Scarlett returned it naturally.

Emma looked over.

"You resisted for nearly three months."

Scarlett smiled.

"I was conducting research."

"Oh?"

"I wanted to know whether hugs spread naturally."

Emma grinned.

"And?"

Scarlett looked around the office.

Accounting was laughing about something.

Logistics had gathered around a shipment schedule.

Someone from customer service had just hugged someone from purchasing.

Nobody thought twice about it.

Scarlett smiled.

"I believe my experiment has concluded."

Just before lunch someone from accounting appeared beside Bianca's desk wearing the most tragic expression imaginable.

Bianca looked up.

"Oh no."

"What?"

"I've had a terrible morning."

Bianca stood immediately.

"You need a Power Hug."

"I suspected as much."

The entire office pretended not to listen.

Bianca wrapped both arms around her.

"Prrrrrrrr..."

The accountant laughed before the hug was even over.

"There."

"Do you feel better?"

"...Annoyingly..."

A pause.

"...yes."

"Told you."

Across the room Violet didn't even look away from her monitor.

"Statistically insignificant sample size."

Bianca grinned.

"Would you like another sample?"

A tiny pause.

"...Later, Bibé."

Half the office smiled.

Lunch no longer happened in little groups.

People simply gathered.

Scarlett joined them with her tray.

There was no executive dining room.

No reserved table.

She sat wherever there happened to be space.

Today...

...that happened to be beside Bianca.

Conversation wandered from suppliers...

...to Christmas decorations...

...to Emma's new houseplant that everyone agreed looked surprisingly judgmental.

Bianca cut her slice of chocolate cake neatly in half.

Scarlett noticed.

"You don't have to."

"I know."

"But you forgot dessert."

Scarlett looked genuinely surprised.

"I did."

"You looked at mine three times."

"I did not."

"You absolutely did."

Laughter spread around the table.

Scarlett accepted half the cake.

"Thank you."

"My pleasure."

No speeches.

No ceremony.

Just cake.

That afternoon Scarlett paused outside Violet's office.

Violet was studying another set of reports.

Scarlett leaned against the doorway.

"Still trying to explain Bianca?"

Violet didn't look up.

"I have stopped trying."

"Oh?"

"I have accepted that the data is correct."

"And?"

Violet finally looked at her.

"I simply don't understand why it is correct."

Scarlett smiled.

"Neither do I."

Both women looked through the glass wall toward the office.

Bianca was helping someone carry two heavy archive boxes.

Halfway across the room she stopped to hug Emma.

Without putting the boxes down.

Emma laughed so hard she almost dropped one.

Scarlett smiled.

Violet watched for another few seconds.

Then, almost absent-mindedly, she started hugging Scarlett.

The gym had found its own rhythm.

Bianca no longer felt like a beginner.

She greeted the receptionist.

Waved at Daniel.

Smiled at several familiar faces.

Then she walked directly toward Naomi.

Neither of them ever questioned why.

"Hi."

"Hi."

Bianca hugged her.

"Prrrrrrrr..."

Naomi smiled into the hug.

She never hurried those few seconds.

Eventually Bianca let go.

Naomi held on for just the smallest heartbeat longer.

Then she stepped back.

"Ready?"

"I think so."

"You'll survive."

"I admire your optimism."

Training no longer required constant instruction.

Naomi corrected a posture.

Adjusted a machine.

Demonstrated a movement.

Sometimes neither of them spoke for several minutes.

The silence had become comfortable.

It no longer needed filling.

Near the end of the session Bianca noticed Naomi slowly rolling one shoulder.

"Sore?"

"A little."

Without another thought Bianca stepped behind her.

"Stay still."

Naomi blinked.

Before she could object, Bianca's hands gently found the tense muscles across her shoulders.

"Like this?"

"...Yes."

"You carry too much tension."

"So I've been told."

"You should listen."

"I probably should."

Bianca continued talking cheerfully.

"...and then Emma insisted her plant was smiling at her."

Naomi laughed quietly.

"It wasn't?"

"It looked judgmental."

"I've met that plant."

"You have?"

"I agree with Bianca."

They both laughed.

Bianca never noticed how still Naomi had become.

Outside, evening had already fallen.

The air carried the first hint of winter.

As always, Naomi walked Bianca to the Uber pickup area.

Neither of them had ever discussed it.

It simply happened.

They talked about Christmas lights.

About Violet's nickname.

"I still don't know where 'Bibé' came from."

Naomi smiled.

"I think it suits you."

A white Uber turned the corner.

Bianca pointed.

"My carriage."

Naomi laughed.

"Your carriage?"

"Well..."

Bianca shrugged.

"...it doesn't look much like a pumpkin."

Naomi opened the rear door.

Bianca hugged her.

"Prrrrrrr..."

Naomi closed her eyes.

Just for a moment.

The hug ended.

Bianca climbed into the car.

She lowered the window.

"See you Tuesday!"

"See you Tuesday."

"And next week..."

Bianca smiled brightly.

"...your turn to choose the restaurant."

Naomi's smile grew.

"I'll think of somewhere."

The Uber pulled away.

Naomi watched until the tail lights disappeared around the corner.

Only then did she turn to walk home.

Across the street, a man leaning against a bus shelter quietly dropped his cigarette onto the pavement.

He didn't look at the departing Uber.

His eyes followed Naomi.

She never noticed.

She was still smiling to herself.

The man waited until she disappeared around the corner.

Then he reached into his coat pocket.

Took out his phone.

And made a call.

Chapter 46 - Fireborn

The idea came to Scarlett on a Tuesday evening.

Not during a board meeting.

Not during a design session.

Not even while sketching a new shoe.

It came while she was watching a documentary about Iceland.

A slow river of glowing lava flowed silently across a field of black volcanic rock. The camera lingered on the contrast between fire and darkness.

Scarlett paused the video.

For several long seconds she simply looked at the screen.

Then she smiled.

"Fireborn."

The name arrived before the campaign.

The campaign arrived before the shoe.

Three days later, after everyone had left the Executive Office aboard the MS Scarlett Heels II, Scarlett closed the door, switched off the office lights and sat alone at the conference table.

Only the large screen illuminated the room.

One by one, faces appeared.

An Icelandic expedition coordinator.

A volcanologist.

A helicopter pilot.

A mountain safety officer.

A photographer specialising in volcanic expeditions.

Not a single fashion expert.

Exactly as Scarlett intended.

"Good evening, Ms. Corvina," the expedition coordinator said. "I'm Freyja Sigurðardóttir. Welcome."

Scarlett nodded politely.

"Thank you for accepting such an unusual request."

Freyja smiled.

"I think all of us are rather curious."

"I expected that."

Scarlett stood and connected her notebook to the screen.

The first image appeared.

A deep ruby-red evening gown.

The second.

A concept rendering of a new Scarlett Heels model.

Elegant.

Powerful.

Unmistakably Scarlett.

Below the rendering stood only one word.

FIREBORN

Nobody spoke.

Finally the volcanologist cleared his throat.

"May I ask..."

"...where exactly you intend to photograph this?"

Scarlett clicked once more.

The screen changed from the shoe to a satellite image of Iceland.

Several volcanic systems had been marked.

"I don't know."

The Icelanders exchanged surprised glances.

Scarlett continued calmly.

"That's why I need all of you."

The atmosphere changed immediately.

This wasn't someone demanding the impossible.

This was someone asking professionals how to make the impossible possible.

For the next ninety minutes, nobody discussed fashion.

Instead, they discussed geology.

Lava temperatures.

Prevailing winds.

Gas concentrations.

Landing zones.

Emergency evacuation procedures.

Sun angles.

Seasonal weather.

Scarlett asked surprisingly few questions.

She mostly listened.

Occasionally she wrote something into a leather notebook resting beside her laptop.

By the end of the meeting, twelve pages were filled.

The helicopter pilot leaned toward his camera.

"If we find the right location..."

"...how close do you actually want to be?"

Scarlett thought for only a second.

"Close enough that people won't believe the photograph."

Silence.

Then the photographer smiled.

"I like that answer."

As the meeting drew to a close, Freyja folded her hands.

"I should mention something."

Scarlett looked up.

"This won't happen next week."

"I know."

"It won't happen next month either."

"I know."

"It may take months."

Scarlett smiled.

"I've built a company."

"I know how to wait."

The video call ended.

The office became quiet once again.

Scarlett closed the notebook.

On its cover she embossed four words with a silver pen.

FIREBORN – ICELAND

She opened the bottom drawer of her desk, placed the notebook inside

and locked it.

The key disappeared into a small compartment hidden beneath the desk.

Nobody would accidentally discover it.

A gentle knock interrupted the silence.

"Come in."

Bianca entered carrying two mugs.

"I thought you might still be working."

Scarlett accepted one gratefully.

"You know me too well."

Bianca glanced toward the dark conference screen.

"Supplier meeting?"

Scarlett smiled.

"Something like that."

Bianca laughed.

"I've stopped asking. Every time you become mysterious, six months later the whole world starts talking about Scarlett Heels."

Scarlett almost laughed.

Almost.

Instead she simply took another sip of coffee.

After a comfortable silence, Bianca stood.

"Don't stay too late."

"I won't."

She reached the door before turning around.

"Oh..."

Scarlett looked up.

"...whatever you're planning..."

"...it's going to be spectacular, isn't it?"

Scarlett answered with the smallest of smiles.

"I hope so."

Bianca nodded knowingly and left.

The door closed softly behind her.

Scarlett remained alone.

She looked toward the locked drawer.

For one brief moment she considered telling Bianca everything.

She pictured the conversation.

Bianca would insist on coming.

Naomi would refuse to let Scarlett travel without protection.

Violet would ask for every technical detail and volunteer immediately.

None of them would let her go alone.

Scarlett already knew that.

Which was precisely why they could never know.

She would never ask her friends to stand beside an active lava flow.

If anyone accepted that risk...

...it would be her.

Outside, the Atlantic rolled quietly beneath the evening sky.

Inside, four months of planning had just begun.

Tuesday.

19:00.

Without fail.

For the next four months, Scarlett's calendar contained a single

recurring appointment.

Video Conference – Supplier

That was all anyone at Scarlett Heels ever saw.

Nobody questioned it.

Scarlett had suppliers all over the world.

The Icelandic team quickly discovered something about their client.

She never wasted time.

The first ten minutes of every meeting were devoted to reviewing what had changed since the previous week.

Volcanic activity.

Weather statistics.

Sunset times.

Helicopter availability.

Everything was documented.

Everything was measured.

Everything had a purpose.

By the fourth meeting, fashion had almost disappeared from the discussions.

The screen was filled with thermal maps.

The volcanologist pointed toward a glowing red line.

"This flow is too unstable."

Another appeared.

"Too much steam."

Another.

"Wrong wind direction."

Scarlett simply made notes.

Not once did she argue.

If an expert rejected a location, it disappeared from consideration immediately.

Week after week, the list became shorter.

Twenty-three possible locations became twelve.

Twelve became six.

Six became three.

Every remaining site looked spectacular.

None were yet acceptable.

Meanwhile, life aboard the MS Scarlett Heels II continued as normal.

Bianca was preparing the Snowflake exhibition.

Naomi supervised a security exercise.

Violet spent days discussing titanium alloys with engineering partners for the next generation of stilettos.

Scarlett attended meetings.

Approved collections.

Welcomed guests.

Smiled during interviews.

Nobody suspected that every Tuesday evening she was quietly planning an expedition to the edge of a volcano.

By the sixth week another face appeared on the conference screen.

A textile engineer.

He greeted everyone before holding a piece of shimmering ruby-red fabric toward the camera.

"It doesn't look very special."

Scarlett smiled.

"It isn't supposed to."

The engineer nodded.

"The outer fibres are treated to withstand intense radiant heat for a limited period."

He folded the fabric.

It moved like silk.

"It still drapes like couture."

"Exactly."

Scarlett's smile grew a little wider.

"No one will know."

The engineer returned the smile.

"That's the point."

The sentence remained with Scarlett long after the meeting had ended.

It sounded remarkably familiar.

Beauty visible.

Engineering invisible.

Exactly the philosophy that guided every Scarlett Heels creation.

The photographer became increasingly fascinated.

She wasn't photographing fashion.

She was helping design a photograph that did not yet exist.

Every meeting became more detailed.

Lens selection.

Camera positions.

Backup positions.

Walking routes.

Wind direction.

Where Scarlett would stop.

Where she would turn.

Where the dress should catch the volcanic glow.

By the third month, they weren't discussing possibilities any more.

They were rehearsing a picture.

One evening, Freyja laughed.

"I've coordinated expeditions for television crews."

She looked around at her colleagues.

"I've worked with documentary film makers."

She smiled at Scarlett.

"But I have never seen anyone prepare a single photograph like this."

Scarlett answered without hesitation.

"Then let's make it unforgettable."

The weeks passed.

One Tuesday, the volcanologist finally smiled.

"I think we've found it."

A satellite image filled the screen.

A broad field of black basalt.

A slow-moving lava river.

Open sky.

Safe helicopter access.

Predictable terrain.

Scarlett studied the image in silence.

She didn't say a word for almost a minute.

Then she simply nodded.

"That's the place."

Only one meeting remained.

The final operational briefing.

Everyone joined.

The atmosphere had changed.

The planning phase was over.

Now every decision mattered.

The safety coordinator summarised the operation.

"The helicopter lands here."

A marker appeared on the map.

"You walk approximately forty meters."

Another marker.

"The photographer will already be in position."

Another marker.

"The guide remains behind you."

"The safety officer watches the wind."

"The volcanologist monitors the lava."

Scarlett listened carefully.

No interruptions.

No questions.

When the briefing was finished, the expedition leader folded his hands.

"Assuming the weather cooperates..."

"...the gas concentrations remain within limits..."

"...and the lava front behaves as expected..."

He looked directly into the camera.

"You will have an operational window of approximately four minutes."

The room became quiet.

Everyone instinctively looked at Scarlett.

She considered the number for a moment.

Then she smiled.

"I only need one."

Silence.

The photographer smiled first.

Then the helicopter pilot.

Even the volcanologist laughed quietly.

Not because the answer was arrogant.

Because after four months, they finally understood the woman they had been working with.

Scarlett wasn't planning to find the photograph.

She had already found it.

The volcano simply hadn't caught up yet.

Day 3 – One Minute

Scarlett woke before sunrise.

The lodge was unusually quiet.

No conversations echoed through the corridors. No coffee machines hummed. Even the wind outside seemed to have paused.

Today, everyone understood that months of planning would either succeed...

...or simply become another rehearsal.

Breakfast was brief.

Nobody spoke much.

Instead, each member of the expedition checked the same equipment one final time.

Cameras.

Radios.

Gas sensors.

Emergency kits.

The photographer cleaned her lenses for what felt like the tenth time.

Scarlett finished her coffee and looked at Freyja.

"Still a go?"

Freyja glanced at the latest weather report before nodding.

"Still a go."

Twenty minutes later, the helicopter lifted into the Icelandic morning.

Below them, endless black lava fields stretched toward the horizon.

Scarlett watched in silence.

She had imagined this flight for four months.

Reality looked even more extraordinary.

No roads.

No buildings.

Only the Earth.

The helicopter slowed.

The pilot pointed ahead.

"There."

Far below, a glowing ribbon of lava slowly crossed the dark landscape.

Even from the air, its colour was astonishing.

It looked unreal.

The photographer smiled.

"No one will believe this."

Scarlett answered softly.

"They don't have to."

The helicopter touched down on a broad field of cold basalt.

The rotors continued turning.

Nobody wasted time.

The guide led the way.

Scarlett followed.

The photographer was already moving toward her position.

Forty meters.

Exactly as rehearsed.

The safety officer checked the wind.

The volcanologist glanced at his instruments.

Everything matched the plan.

He gave a single nod.

Scarlett stepped onto the marked position.

Ahead of her, the lava flowed silently across the volcanic plain.

There was no explosion.

No roaring inferno.

Only an endless river of liquid fire, moving with almost unbelievable calm.

She understood immediately why Icelanders respected volcanoes instead of fearing them.

They didn't rage.

They endured.

The photographer raised her camera.

No instructions.

There was no need.

Scarlett already knew the photograph.
She had lived with it for four months.
She turned slightly toward the lava.
The morning breeze lifted one side of her ruby-red gown.
The volcanic glow reflected across the fabric like moving light.
Click.
Another step.
Click.
She looked toward the distant horizon rather than into the camera.
Click.
The photographer lowered the camera for a brief second.
Then raised it once more.
One final frame.
Click.
The safety officer looked at his watch.
"One minute."
Scarlett smiled.
"I told you."
Even Freyja laughed.
The guide motioned toward the helicopter.
Without hesitation, everyone turned back.
No one suggested staying longer.
There was nothing left to improve.
The photograph already existed.
As the helicopter climbed into the sky, Scarlett looked down through the window.

The black lava field became smaller.

The glowing river of fire slowly disappeared beneath the morning haze.

She didn't know whether the picture would become iconic.

She only knew one thing.

It was real.

Four months of planning.

One minute beside a volcano.

One photograph.

Sometimes...

...that was all it took to create history.

The return flight was almost uneventful.

Scarlett sat by the window of the airliner watching Iceland slowly disappear beneath the clouds.

Four months.

Four days.

One minute.

She smiled.

It had been enough.

By early evening she was back aboard the MS Scarlett Heels II.

Nothing had changed.

Bianca was discussing preparations for an upcoming boutique opening.

Naomi had just completed a security review.

Violet was immersed in yet another engineering report.

Everyone greeted Scarlett as though she had simply returned from another routine business trip.

Which, officially...

...she had.

Life continued exactly as before.

Meetings.

Design reviews.

Interviews.

Product presentations.

The FIREBORN notebook remained locked away inside Scarlett's desk.

Not a single photograph left Iceland.

The expedition team had signed strict confidentiality agreements.

For weeks...

Nothing happened.

Then, one Thursday morning, the latest issue of Vugoe arrived.

As always, several copies were placed on the table in the Scarlett Heels Lounge.

Bianca picked one up while waiting for Scarlett.

She casually turned the cover.

Her smile disappeared.

"...Scarlett?"

Scarlett looked up from her coffee.

"Yes?"

Bianca silently handed her the magazine.

Across two full pages stood Scarlett.

Alone.

Wrapped in a flowing ruby-red gown.

Standing only meters from a glowing river of lava.

Above the photograph appeared a single word.

FIREBORN

For several seconds the lounge remained completely silent.

Naomi entered.

"What happened?"

Bianca simply handed her the magazine.

Naomi studied the photograph.

Then looked at Scarlett.

"That's real."

Scarlett nodded.

"Yes."

Violet joined them moments later.

She looked at the image.

Her eyes immediately ignored the dress.

Ignored the shoes.

Ignored the headline.

Instead she quietly observed the lava.

The basalt.

The photographer's angle.

The distance.

Finally she asked,

"How close?"

Scarlett smiled.

"Close enough."

Violet nodded slowly.

"Calculated."

Exactly the answer she had expected.

Violet protests: "AI can create a picture."

Scarlett: "Reality creates a legend."

Bianca was still staring at the photograph.

"You went to Iceland?"

"Yes."

"You never told us."

"No."

"You photographed beside an active lava flow?"

"Yes."

Another silence.

Bianca closed the magazine.

Very carefully.

She walked around the table toward Scarlett.

Scarlett immediately stood.

A small smile appeared.

"I suppose..."

"...this is the part where I receive my punishment."

Bianca folded her arms.

"You knew."

"I did."

"You knew I'd never let you go."

Scarlett nodded.

"I know."

Naomi added,

"Neither would I."

Scarlett looked at both of them.

"That's exactly why I couldn't tell you."

Nobody spoke.

Scarlett continued softly.

"If I'd told Bianca..."

"...she would have insisted on coming."

Bianca didn't deny it.

"If I'd told Naomi..."

"...she would have come to protect me."

Naomi simply nodded.

"And Violet..."

Violet smiled.

"I would have brought measuring equipment."

Everyone laughed.

Even Bianca.

Scarlett's expression became serious again.

"I accepted the risk for myself."

She looked at each of them in turn.

"But I was never going to ask my friends to accept it with me."

Silence filled the room.

Not an uncomfortable silence.

A warm one.

Bianca stepped forward.

Without another word...

...she wrapped Scarlett in the strongest hug she could manage.

Scarlett laughed.

"There it is."

"The power hug."

Bianca refused to let go.

"You frightened me..."

"...weeks after it happened."

Scarlett gently hugged her back.

"I'm sorry."

"No."

Bianca smiled.

"I'm just very glad you're home."

Naomi picked up the magazine once more.

She looked at the photograph carefully.

Then smiled.

"It was worth it."

Scarlett raised an eyebrow.

"You think so?"

Naomi turned the magazine so everyone could see it again.

"I've never seen anything like it."

Neither had anyone else.

That afternoon the photograph spread around the world.

Fashion magazines called it fearless.

Photographers called it impossible.

Readers argued for days whether it had even been real.

Scarlett never corrected them.

She simply smiled whenever someone asked.

Some stories...

...were better left surrounded by a little mystery.

And somewhere in Iceland, a river of lava continued its slow journey across the black basalt, completely unaware that, for exactly one minute, it had become part of Scarlett Heels history.

Scarlett Heels

Fireborn

FIREBORN

THE NEW COLLECTION
BY SCARLETT HEELS



SCARLETT HEELS

BORN OF AMBITION.
FORGED BY FIRE.

Scarlett Covina

FOUNDER & CREATIVE DIRECTOR



EXTRAORDINARY SHOES FOR EXTRAORDINARY WOMEN
HANDCRAFTED TO ORDER. MADE TO EMPOWER.

Chapter 48 - The Assault

Tuesday evenings had developed their own comforting rhythm.

Work.

The gym.

Training with Naomi.

A hug.

A little conversation.

An Uber home.

It had become so familiar that Bianca no longer thought about it.

She simply lived it.

"Hi."

Naomi looked up from adjusting a rowing machine.

"Hi."

Bianca smiled.

Without hesitation she stepped forward and wrapped both arms around

Naomi.

"Prrrrrrrr..."

Naomi smiled into the hug.

She never seemed to mind the purring.

If anything...

...she appeared to enjoy it.

Eventually Bianca let go.

Naomi did too.

One heartbeat later.

"Ready?"

"I suppose suffering builds character."

"So I've been told."

"I was hoping you'd disagree."

Naomi almost smiled.

"You'll survive."

"I admire your optimism."

Training passed quickly.

Machines.

Stretching.

Laughter.

A conversation about whether Emma's office plant had finally accepted being called judgmental.

Bianca insisted it still looked offended.

Naomi claimed plants were incapable of holding grudges.

"I disagree."

"I noticed."

The gym emptied gradually.

The evening classes had already finished.

The music became softer.

One trainer waved goodbye.

Another locked one of the equipment rooms before leaving.

Daniel passed them on his way out.

"Night."

"Good night."

Naomi nodded.

"See you Thursday."

Daniel disappeared through the main entrance.

The receptionist remained behind the front desk.

The building had become unusually quiet.

Bianca finished putting away the last pair of weights.

"There."

Naomi nodded approvingly.

"You're learning."

"I'm trainable."

"Barely."

Bianca laughed.

"I'll accept that as praise."

Naomi glanced at the clock.

"I just need to put a few things away."

"I'll get changed."

"I'll meet you outside."

"As always."

Bianca smiled and disappeared toward the changing rooms.

The women's locker room was empty.

Bianca changed quickly.

Still smiling to herself.

She folded her training clothes neatly into her bag.

Checked her phone.

One unread message from Emma.

Don't forget Friday's cake.

Bianca laughed quietly.

"As if I'd forget cake."

She slung the bag over her shoulder and stepped back into the corridor.

The gym felt almost deserted now.

She headed toward the reception.

Then paused.

A man's voice echoed from somewhere nearby.

"Hey."

She turned.

Three men stood a short distance away.

She vaguely recognised them.

New members.

She had seen them around the gym once or twice.

One smiled.

"You're Bianca, right?"

She nodded.

"...Yes."

"You always leave so quickly."

"I've got someone waiting."

"So do we."

Something about the way he smiled made her stomach tighten.

"I'm sorry."

She pointed toward reception.

"I really should—"

Another man casually stepped into the corridor.

Not aggressively.

Just enough.

Without thinking, Bianca changed direction.

Toward the locker rooms.

The third man was already there.

The smile disappeared from her face.

"Excuse me."

Nobody moved.

The first man took another step.

"We just want to talk."

"I don't."

He laughed.

"Don't be like that."

Bianca tried to walk past.

A hand closed gently around her wrist.

Not painfully.

Firmly.

She immediately pulled back.

"Please let go."

He didn't.

Another step.

Another.

Without realising it, Bianca found herself backing toward the men's locker room.

"No."

She shook her head.

"I don't want to."

One of them pushed open the locker room door.

"Come on."

"I'm waiting for someone."

"So are we."

The words were followed by laughter.

Bianca's heart began beating faster.

She looked behind her.

The corridor was empty.

The reception desk was too far away.

Nobody could see inside the locker room.

She took one last step backward.

There was nowhere left to go.

Naomi returned to the training area carrying a stack of folded exercise mats.

She placed them neatly onto the shelf.

Looked toward the reception.

No Bianca.

She smiled to herself.

Probably talking to Emma.

She walked to the front desk.

"Has Bianca gone already?"

The receptionist looked up.

"I thought she was still with you."

Naomi frowned.

"No."

A tiny silence.

Something felt...

wrong.

Not dramatic.

Just...

wrong.

Bianca always said goodbye.

Always.

Naomi looked toward the women's locker room.

Empty.

She checked the stretching area.

Empty.

Then she heard it.

Not a scream.

Just one frightened voice.

"...Please."

Very quiet.

Coming from the men's locker room.

Naomi didn't run.

She walked.

Fast.

Purposefully.

Every step perfectly controlled.

Inside the locker room Bianca stood backed against a row of lockers.

One man blocked the exit.

Another still held her wrist.

The third leaned casually against a bench as though nothing unusual was happening.

Bianca saw Naomi first.

Relief flooded her face.

"Naomi..."

The room fell silent.

One of the men looked over his shoulder.

"Oh."

He smiled.

"Your trainer."

Naomi's eyes never left Bianca.

"Let her go."

Her voice was calm.

Almost quiet.

The man laughed.

"Relax."

He looked back at Bianca.

"We're only having fun."

Naomi repeated herself.

Exactly the same way.

"Let her go."

Another man walked toward her.

Slowly.

Amused.

He rested one hand on Naomi's shoulder.

"Come on."

He nodded toward Bianca.

"You can leave..."

A grin spread across his face.

"...or join the party."

For one endless heartbeat...

...nothing happened.

Then—

The hand vanished from Naomi's shoulder.

Its owner hit the floor before anyone understood why.

The second man spun around.

"What the—"

His sentence ended somewhere between standing and lying flat on the tiles.

The third lunged.

Naomi moved once.

Only once.

A short blur of motion.
A sharp cry.
Then silence.
Three men.
Three different places on the floor.
None of them moved.
The entire confrontation had lasted only seconds.
Naomi didn't even look at them.
She stepped over one of them as though he no longer existed.
Straight to Bianca.
"Bianca."
That single word broke something inside her.
Bianca threw herself into Naomi's arms.
Not politely.
Not gratefully.
Desperately.
As though letting go would somehow make everything begin again.
Her knees gave way.
Naomi caught her before she could fall.
Bianca buried her face against Naomi's shoulder.
She was trembling so violently she could hardly stand.
Naomi wrapped both arms around her.
Holding her securely.
Protectively.
The locker room became completely silent.
For several long seconds...

...neither of them spoke.

The only sound was Bianca trying to steady her breathing.

She held Naomi as tightly as she could.

As if she never wanted to let go again.

Chapter 49 - Mending

Naomi didn't let go.

Not because Bianca held on so tightly.

Because she could still feel Bianca trembling.

Very gently she brushed a loose strand of blonde hair away from Bianca's face.

"You're safe."

Bianca nodded.

But she didn't loosen her grip.

Not even a little.

Naomi waited.

There was no hurry.

Eventually Bianca's breathing became a little steadier.

Only then did Naomi speak again.

"...Can you walk?"

Bianca tried.

Her knees immediately threatened to give way again.

Naomi caught her before she could fall.

For a moment neither of them said anything.

Then Naomi smiled.

"I've got you."

Without another word she slipped one arm beneath Bianca's knees.

The other behind her back.

And lifted her as though she weighed almost nothing.

Bianca didn't protest.

She simply wrapped both arms around Naomi's neck.

Rested her head against her shoulder.

Closed her eyes.

The receptionist looked up as Naomi emerged from the corridor.

Her smile disappeared instantly.

"What happened?"

Naomi answered quietly.

"I need the side office."

The receptionist was already unlocking the door.

"No interruptions."

Naomi nodded.

"Thank you."

She carried Bianca inside.

The room was small.

A sofa.

Two chairs.

A low table.

Nothing more.

Naomi sat down first.

Only then did she gently lower Bianca onto the sofa.

She remained beside her.

Close enough that Bianca could reach her without moving.

Which she immediately did.

Her hand found Naomi's.

Held it.

Naomi let her.

Several minutes passed.

Neither of them spoke.

The silence wasn't uncomfortable.

It was necessary.

Outside, someone closed a door.

The muffled sounds of the reception drifted faintly through the wall.

Inside the little office...

...the world seemed to have stopped.

Finally Naomi asked quietly,

"...Are you hurt?"

Bianca shook her head.

"I don't think so."

Naomi wasn't satisfied.

"May I?"

Bianca nodded.

Naomi examined her wrist.

A faint red mark where someone had grabbed her.

Nothing more.

She checked Bianca's other hand.

Her shoulders.

Her face.

Looking for anything she might have missed.

Only when she was completely certain did she finally exhale.

It was so quiet Bianca almost didn't hear it.

"I'm sorry."

Naomi looked up.

"For what?"

"...I'm making such a fuss."

Naomi stared at her for a moment.

Then she said, very simply,

"You were assaulted."

A pause.

"You're allowed to make a fuss."

Something inside Bianca quietly relaxed.

She hadn't realised she needed permission.

For the first time since the locker room...

...she really looked at Naomi.

A strand of dark hair had escaped its ponytail.

One sleeve of her training shirt was torn.

The knuckles on her right hand were beginning to redden.

"...You're hurt."

Naomi glanced down.

"It's nothing."

Bianca reached for her hand.

Very carefully.

As though it were made of glass.

She turned it slightly.

Examining the reddened knuckles.

"You'll have bruises."

Naomi smiled faintly.

"I've had worse."

Bianca looked up.

"I don't like it."

Naomi's smile grew just a little.

"I know."

Very gently Bianca gave the knuckles a little kiss.

"I'm sorry."

Naomi frowned.

"You have nothing to apologise for."

"You got hurt because of me."

"I got hurt protecting you."

There was no hesitation.

No heroics.

Just a simple statement of fact.

Bianca lowered her eyes.

"...Thank you."

Naomi didn't answer.

She simply closed her fingers gently around Bianca's hand.

Another silence settled between them.

A different one this time.

Softer.

Safer.

Eventually Bianca looked up again.

"Naomi?"

"Hm?"

"...Why did you come?"

Naomi looked almost surprised by the question.

"You didn't say goodbye."

Bianca blinked.

"What?"

"You always say goodbye."

A tiny smile.

"You didn't."

Bianca stared at her.

"So you came looking for me..."

Naomi nodded.

"I thought something was wrong."

Neither of them spoke.

Bianca slowly realised just how closely Naomi had been paying attention all these weeks.

To something as small...

...as saying goodbye.

The receptionist knocked softly.

"Mrs. Bellamy is on her way."

Bianca looked at Naomi.

"I called her."

Bianca nodded.

"I thought that might be best."

"It was."

Twenty minutes later, Mrs. Bellamy hurried into the room.

She stopped the moment she saw Bianca.

"My darling."

Bianca stood.

This time her knees held.

She stepped into her mother's embrace.

Mrs. Bellamy held her for a long moment.

Then she looked at Naomi.

Her eyes lingered on the torn sleeve.

The bruised hand.

She understood.

No explanation was necessary.

She crossed the room.

Stopped in front of Naomi.

And quietly embraced her too.

"Thank you."

Naomi looked almost embarrassed.

"I only did what anyone should."

Mrs. Bellamy slowly shook her head.

"No."

Her voice was calm.

"You did what very few people could."

The drive home passed almost entirely in silence.

Bianca looked out of the window.

Street lights slipped across the glass.

Every now and then...

...she glanced at her own hands.

Then, without meaning to...

...she remembered another pair of hands.

Naomi's.

Protecting her.

Holding her.

Checking her wrists.

Making absolutely certain she wasn't hurt.

That night Bianca couldn't sleep.

She wasn't frightened any more.

Every time she closed her eyes...

...she saw Naomi standing in the doorway of the locker room.

Calm.

Completely fearless.

Then she remembered the way Naomi had carried her.

The way she had held her hand.

The way she had noticed something as ordinary...

...as forgetting to say goodbye.

Bianca smiled faintly into the darkness.

A strange warmth spread quietly through her chest.

She had never really understood why girls at school spent so much time talking about boys.

She had simply assumed she wasn't interested.

Now...

...for the very first time...

...she wondered why her heart beat just a little faster whenever she thought about Naomi.

The thought caught her completely by surprise.

She opened her eyes.

Stared at the ceiling.

"...Huh."

She smiled to herself.

Pulled the blanket a little closer.

And long after midnight...

...the last thing she thought about before finally falling asleep...

...was Naomi.

Chapter 50 - Building Something New

For the next few days, everyone tried to return to normal.

Scarlett buried herself in work.

Violet immersed herself in plans for software updates and production schedules.

Naomi visited Mrs. Bellamy's house every afternoon.

And Bianca...

...rarely left her room.

She wasn't injured badly enough to remain in bed. The bruises on her body faded a little each day. The ones nobody could see did not.

Whenever Naomi arrived, Bianca smiled.

Whenever Naomi left, the house felt a little quieter.

Mrs. Bellamy watched everything without saying much.

She had lived long enough to recognise that healing could not be forced.

One evening, after Bianca had gone upstairs, Mrs. Bellamy wandered through the silent rooms of her home.

Her gaze settled on an old framed photograph.

Her late husband stood proudly aboard his yacht, laughing into the summer sun.

She picked up the picture.

"You loved that ridiculous boat," she whispered.

A faint smile appeared.

"I never understood why."

After his death she had never set foot on the yacht again.

It had remained exactly as he had left it.

A monument.

Not to the wonderful years they had shared...

...but to the day they had ended.

She looked at the photograph for a long time.

Then another thought entered her mind.

Perhaps...

...it didn't have to remain a monument forever.

She picked up her phone.

The following morning, Scarlett and Violet met Mrs. Bellamy at the marina.

The yacht gleamed brilliantly in the morning sunlight.

Elegant.

Powerful.

Timeless.

Scarlett and Violet arrive at the marina.

Scarlett assumes Mrs. Bellamy wants to sell it.

Instead she hands Scarlett a folder.

Scarlett opens it.

It's the transfer of ownership.

She looked up in disbelief.

"Mrs. Bellamy... I can't accept this."

Mrs. Bellamy closes the folder again.

"You're not accepting a yacht."

She looked at Bianca.

"You're accepting a chance."

A long silence.

Then she continues.

"My husband bought this ship believing happiness could be found on the sea."

She smiled sadly.

"He was wrong."

Scarlett waits.

Mrs. Bellamy looked at the four women standing together.

"Happiness isn't a place."

Another pause.

"It's the people you share it with."

She places the folder back into Scarlett's hands.

"Take the yacht."

"Fill it with laughter."

"Make memories I never could."

Scarlett slowly walked along the quay, studying every detail.

Violet was already looking beyond the polished teak decks.

"The electrical systems are outdated," she murmured.

"The bridge needs a complete redesign."

Scarlett smiled.

"So does almost everything else."

Mrs. Bellamy watched them both.

"What do you think?"

Scarlett folded her arms.

"The structure is excellent."

She looked toward the upper decks.

"We could turn her into something extraordinary."

Violet nodded immediately.

"It'll take a complete refit."

Scarlett thought for another moment.

"About six weeks."

Mrs. Bellamy quietly opened her handbag.

Neither Scarlett nor Violet noticed.

She removed an elegant leather cheque book and began writing.

When she finished, she tore out the cheque and handed it to Scarlett.

Scarlett looked at the amount.

She blinked.

"Mrs. Bellamy..."

Mrs. Bellamy smiled.

"Make that four weeks."

For the first time that morning...

...even Violet had no reply.

That afternoon Scarlett visited Bianca.

She found her sitting in the conservatory, quietly watching the garden through the large windows.

Scarlett sat down beside her.

For a while neither of them spoke.

Finally Bianca asked,

"How's the yacht?"

Scarlett smiled.

"It's a mess."

That earned the smallest hint of a smile.

"Walls are coming down."

"Old rooms are disappearing."

"Everything is changing."

Bianca turned to look at her.

Scarlett's smile grew warmer.

"We're building something new."

Bianca followed her gaze out into the garden.

For the first time since the assault...

...the future didn't seem quite so far away.

Chapter 51 - Healing

Every afternoon, shortly after three o'clock, the doorbell rang.

Mrs. Bellamy never had to ask who it was.

She already knew.

Naomi.

The ritual soon became part of the house.

Mrs. Bellamy opened the door with a warm smile.

"Good afternoon, Naomi."

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Bellamy."

Naomi brought nothing with her except herself.

That was enough.

At first Bianca still spent most of the day in her room.

Naomi would sit in the armchair nearby.

Sometimes they talked.

Sometimes they didn't.

There was never any pressure to fill the silence.

Day by day, Bianca spent a little more time outside her room.

One afternoon they sat together in the conservatory.

Another day they wandered slowly through the garden.

The following week they shared tea beneath the old oak tree.

Progress came quietly.

Almost unnoticed.

Some afternoons they talked for hours.

About work.

About music.

About childhood memories.

About dreams neither of them had ever spoken aloud.

Other afternoons they hardly exchanged a dozen words.

Naomi simply sat beside Bianca, watching the garden through the large windows.

Sometimes birds landed on the lawn.

Sometimes rain drummed softly against the glass.

Sometimes they simply watched the clouds drift across the sky.

Little by little...

...the distance between them disappeared.

One afternoon Bianca rested her head against Naomi's shoulder.

Neither of them mentioned it.

The following day she did it again.

Soon it had become the most natural thing in the world.

Neither of them questioned it.

Neither of them wanted it to change.

Mrs. Bellamy watched all of it with quiet satisfaction.

She said nothing.

Some discoveries belonged to the people making them.

One evening Naomi slipped into her jacket as she had done every day for weeks.

"I'll come back tomorrow."

Mrs. Bellamy looked up from the book in her lap.

"It's getting late."

Naomi nodded.

"I know."

Mrs. Bellamy closed the book.

"Why don't you stay for the night?"

Naomi blinked.

"I... I don't want to impose."

Mrs. Bellamy smiled.

"I don't think Bianca would mind."

Naomi hesitated.

Mrs. Bellamy's smile grew a little warmer.

"You're both adults."

A brief silence followed.

Then she added softly,

"And you're obviously in love."

Naomi stared at her.

For a moment she completely forgot how to speak.

Mrs. Bellamy simply smiled, rose from her chair and disappeared into the kitchen, leaving Naomi alone in the hallway.

A few minutes later Naomi stood outside Bianca's bedroom door.

She knocked softly.

"Come in."

Bianca looked up from the novel resting on her lap.

Naomi smiled awkwardly.

"Your mother said I should stay."

Bianca looked at her for a long moment.

Then a gentle smile spread across her face.

"I hoped you would."

Chapter 52 - The Fourth Pillar

The following morning Scarlett parked her car outside the fitness studio.

For a moment she remained seated behind the steering wheel, watching people come and go through the glass entrance.

Only a few weeks earlier, Bianca had walked through those same doors. Everything had changed since then.

Scarlett stepped out of the car.

Naomi was finishing her morning workout when she noticed Scarlett entering the gym.

A surprised smile crossed her face.

"Scarlett."

Scarlett smiled back.

"I hope I'm not interrupting."

Naomi laughed softly.

"You've never been here before."

"I know."

Naomi picked up a towel.

"Give me five minutes?"

Scarlett nodded.

"I'll wait."

A short while later they sat together in the small café overlooking the training area.

For a few moments Scarlett simply watched the people exercising below.

Then she turned toward Naomi.

"I have a question."

Naomi smiled.

"That sounds serious."

"It is."

Scarlett reached into her handbag and placed a leather folder on the table.

Naomi looked at it curiously.

Scarlett slid it across.

"I'd like you to become Head of Security for Scarlett Heels."

Naomi blinked.

She looked from the folder to Scarlett.

"I..."

She stopped.

Scarlett waited patiently.

"I've never worked for a company like yours."

"I know."

"I've never lived on a ... yacht. You want me to come to your yacht?!"

"Yes."

"I don't know anything about luxury."

Scarlett smiled.

"I know."

Naomi looked completely overwhelmed.

"Then... why me?"

Scarlett leaned back.

"Because when Bianca needed someone..."

"...you were already there."

Silence.

Scarlett continued.

"I can teach procedures."

"I can teach protocols."

"I can teach security systems."

She smiled gently.

"What I can't teach..."

"...is character."

Naomi lowered her eyes.

For the first time in many years...

...she didn't know what to say.

Scarlett pushed the folder a little closer.

"I'd be honored if you joined us."

Slowly Naomi opened it.

Inside lay a prepared employment contract.

Already signed.

She looked up.

"You were that certain?"

Scarlett smiled.

"I've been certain for quite a while."

Naomi couldn't help laughing.

"And you know what: I recently got in trouble with my boss because I beat up three customers. How's that for unfair?"

"Really?"

"Really."

Naomi picked up the pen resting inside the folder.

Without another word...

...she signed.

Scarlett extended her hand.

"Welcome to Scarlett Heels."

Naomi shook it.

Then she stood and hugged Scarlett the way Bianca always did.

"Thank you."

Scarlett smiled.

For a brief moment it felt like the beginning of something much larger than a new job.

That afternoon Scarlett returned to Mrs. Bellamy's house.

Bianca was sitting in the garden, a book resting unopened on her lap.

She looked brighter than she had in weeks.

Scarlett smiled.

"I have some good news."

Bianca looked up immediately.

"So do I."

Scarlett laughed.

"Go ahead."

Bianca hesitated.

Then she took a deep breath.

"I've been thinking..."

Scarlett waited.

"When we move onto the yacht..."

"...could Naomi come with us? ...Please?!"

Scarlett looked at her for a moment.

Then the corners of her mouth lifted into a knowing smile.

"I was wondering when you'd ask."

Bianca blinked.

Scarlett reached into her handbag and placed another leather folder onto the table.

Bianca looked at it in confusion.

"What is this?"

"Naomi's employment contract."

Bianca stared at Scarlett.

Scarlett smiled.

"I hired her this morning."

For a heartbeat Bianca simply looked at the folder.

Then she looked back at Scarlett.

"You already knew."

Scarlett nodded.

"I've known for some time."

Bianca laughed through the tears gathering in her eyes.

Without saying another word she stood, stepped around the table and wrapped Scarlett in a warm embrace.

Scarlett smiled as she returned the embrace.

Two hugs in a single day.

A week ago Bianca hadn't wanted to leave her room.

Today she was hugging people again.

Slowly...

...life was finding its way back.

Softly she said,

"I told you."

Bianca looked up.

"We're building something new."

For the first time since the assault...

...Bianca truly believed it.

Scarlett was on her way home when her phone rang.

She smiled as soon as she saw the name.

"Hello, Violet."

"Hello, Scarlett."

There was a brief silence.

Then Violet asked,

"The renovations are complete. Would you like to join me on the yacht?"

Scarlett smiled.

"See you in 30 minutes."

Half an hour later they stood on the topmost deck of the yacht.

The yacht shimmered below them.

For a while neither of them spoke.

Then Violet smiled.

"Do you remember our first lunch?"

Scarlett chuckled.

"Four hours."

"And a lot of missed calls."

They both smiled.

A short silence.

Violet looked down over the illuminated yacht.

"We talked for four hours."

Scarlett smiled.

"I simply hadn't met anyone like you before."

Violet looked at her.

"Neither had I."

For another quiet moment they stood side by side, looking down at everything they had built together.

Then Scarlett turned toward Violet.

"Thank you for building this with me."

Violet smiled.

"Thank you for letting me."

She stepped closer and wrapped Scarlett in a warm embrace.

Scarlett smiled and returned the hug.

After hugging Naomi and Bianca today, this was the third hug with the people she planned to spend the next chapter of her life with.

The Four Pillars of Scarlett Heels were finally complete.

While life aboard the yacht continued, Scarlett Heels launched another campaign. London Nocturne soon joined the growing collection of iconic Scarlett Heels photographs.

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It is simply unforgettable.*



Created for women who
define their own legacy.
Not for the world.
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Nocturne is a tribute to quiet
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Because some women
don't chase attention.
They leave an impression.



Photographed exclusively
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*No noise.
No artificial scenery.
Only mist.
Only London.
Only perfection.*



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Crafted by Hand. Inspired by Women. Timeless by Design.

Chapter 54 - Welcome Aboard

The limousine rolled to a gentle stop at the private marina.

For a moment, nobody moved.

Scarlett smiled faintly as she looked through the tinted window.

"We're here."

Bianca eagerly reached for the door handle, but Scarlett gently placed a hand on her arm.

"Not yet."

Bianca frowned.

"Why?"

"I want us to step out together."

Naomi exchanged a curious glance with Violet.

Scarlett had been unusually secretive during the entire drive. Ever since receiving Mrs. Bellamy's unexpected gift, she had refused to reveal what had become of the old yacht. Violet had disappeared for weeks overseeing the reconstruction, always returning with an exhausted smile. But it had been worth the wait.

Scarlett opened the door.

A warm sea breeze drifted into the limousine.

"Come."

The four women stepped onto the pier.

Bianca looked toward the water.

Her eyes widened.

She stopped walking.

"...Oh..."

The others did exactly the same.

Towering above the marina stood a magnificent red yacht unlike anything they had ever imagined.

Its sleek lines stretched far across the harbour, gleaming in the afternoon sun. Panoramic black glass reflected the blue sky, polished chrome sparkled along the railings, and multiple decks rose elegantly one above another like the levels of a floating palace.

Across the bow, written in graceful golden letters, stood its name.

MS Scarlett Heels

For several seconds nobody spoke.

Even Violet, who had supervised the entire conversion, simply admired the finished result.

Scarlett slowly exhaled.

"I've seen her many times during construction."

She smiled.

"But somehow..."

"...today she feels different."

Bianca laughed quietly, though her voice trembled.

"I thought we were getting a yacht."

She pointed upward.

"This is a city."

Naomi nodded.

"I've guarded embassies that looked less impressive."

Violet folded her arms proudly.

"Technically speaking..."

"...she's smarter than most office buildings."

Scarlett raised an eyebrow.

"That worries me just a little."

The four of them laughed.

Waiting beside the gangway stood a small group of dock personnel.

One of them welcomed Scarlett with a respectful nod.

"Miss Corvina."

"Everything is ready."

"Thank you."

Scarlett looked toward the narrow gangway leading aboard.

"Shall we?"

Bianca confidently took the first step.

Her confidence lasted approximately two seconds.

She looked down.

The gangway suddenly appeared much narrower than before.

Far below, gentle waves reflected the sunlight.

Her impossibly high heels suddenly felt... impossibly high.

She carefully placed one foot onto the gangway.

The heel slipped slightly against the polished surface.

Bianca froze.

"...I have made a terrible mistake."

Naomi covered her mouth to hide a grin.

Scarlett tried not to laugh.

Violet failed completely.

"Oh, don't you dare," Bianca protested without turning around.

"I'm serious."

"I know," Violet replied between laughs.

"That's exactly why it's funny."

Bianca slowly lifted one foot again.

"No."

Another step.

"Nope."

She carefully retreated back onto the pier.

"I officially resign from walking."

Naomi stepped beside her.

"May I?"

Bianca looked up.

"What are you planning?"

Instead of answering, Naomi simply slipped one arm beneath Bianca's knees and the other around her back.

With effortless ease, she lifted Bianca into her arms.

Bianca squeaked in surprise.

"Naomi!"

"You said you resigned."

"I accepted."

The dock workers politely looked away.

Scarlett could not suppress a smile.

"I think that's an excellent solution."

Bianca wrapped one arm around Naomi's shoulders.

"I am perfectly capable of walking."

"I know."

"So put me down."

"No."

"...Please?"

Naomi simply started walking.

Steady.

Calm.

Completely unaffected by Bianca's weight.

Bianca sighed dramatically.

"I've lost this discussion, haven't I?"

"You never had a chance."

The others followed across the gangway, Scarlett smiling the entire way.

At the top, Naomi gently placed Bianca back onto her feet.

"There."

"Safely aboard."

Bianca looked at her.

"Thank you."

Naomi smiled.

"You're welcome."

Scarlett stepped onto the polished teak deck.

For a brief moment she remained completely still.

The quiet sound of the sea.

The distant cries of gulls.

The faint scent of polished wood.

This was no longer Mrs. Bellamy's yacht.

It was home.

A pair of elegant glass doors silently opened before them.

Inside waited a spacious entrance hall unlike anything Bianca had ever seen aboard a ship.

White marble stretched across the floor, interrupted by delicate ruby-red inlays forming the Scarlett Heels crest. Crystal chandeliers sparkled overhead, while sweeping staircases curved gracefully toward the upper decks. Gold accents, warm walnut wood and towering glass walls filled the room with afternoon light reflected from the sea outside.

Everything felt open.

Elegant.

Timeless.

Bianca slowly turned in a circle.

"I..."

She searched for words.

"I don't even know where to look."

Scarlett smiled softly.

"Neither do I."

Violet watched them with quiet satisfaction.

"Good."

Scarlett looked at her.

"'Good'?"

Violet nodded.

"That was exactly the intended effect."

She looked around the magnificent hall.

"Every visitor should step aboard..."

"...and immediately understand that Scarlett Heels is unlike any company they have ever encountered."

Naomi gazed up toward the glittering chandeliers.

"I think they will."

Bianca walked slowly to the centre of the hall.

She looked upward.

Then toward the grand staircase.

Then back toward the entrance through which the sea was still visible.

Finally she turned toward Scarlett.

Her eyes shone with unmistakable excitement.

"So..."

"When do we start exploring?"

Scarlett laughed.

"I thought you'd never ask."

Violet stepped forward with an unmistakably mischievous smile.

"Oh..."

"I have something to show you."

She glanced toward a corridor leading deeper into the ship.

"And trust me..."

"...you've never seen anything like it."

The four women followed her, their footsteps echoing softly through the magnificent hall as the doors closed behind them.

The adventure had finally begun.

Chapter 55 - Cast Off

Violet led the way through a series of elegant corridors.

Every few steps Bianca stopped to admire another detail.

The polished marble.

The warm golden lighting.

The panoramic windows revealing the harbour outside.

"This place is unbelievable."

Violet smiled.

"We've barely begun."

They reached a pair of tall black glass doors.

Unlike every other door aboard the yacht, these bore no sign.

Only the Scarlett Heels crest.

Violet placed her hand against a discreet crystal panel.

A soft chime sounded.

"Identity confirmed."

The doors slid silently apart.

Bianca's jaw dropped.

"...No."

The room before them looked nothing like the bridge of a yacht.

There was no massive steering wheel.

No forest of switches.

No rows of blinking buttons.

Instead, a spacious circular room opened before them, surrounded by floor-to-ceiling panoramic windows that offered an uninterrupted view across the harbour.

The centre of the room was almost empty.

Only four elegant command stations emerged from the polished black floor.

Above them floated translucent holographic displays glowing in soft ruby, gold and sapphire tones.

Information drifted through the air.

Navigation.

Weather.

Engine systems.

Radar.

Communications.

Everything appeared almost weightless.

Bianca slowly walked into the room.

"...We're on a spaceship."

Violet laughed.

"I was hoping someone would say that."

Scarlett turned slowly, taking in every detail.

"You built all this?"

Violet nodded.

"Almost everything."

She gently touched the air above one of the consoles.

The holographic display reacted instantly.

Windows expanded.

Maps rotated.

Three-dimensional models of the yacht appeared and dissolved again.

"There are physical backup controls," Violet explained.

"They're concealed behind these panels."

She pointed toward the seamless walls.

"But under normal conditions, the bridge is operated entirely by voice, gesture and holographic interface."

Naomi looked around carefully.

"I don't see a captain."

Violet smiled.

"There isn't one."

Scarlett looked at her with surprise.

"There has to be."

"There is."

Violet looked directly at Scarlett.

"You."

Scarlett blinked.

"Me?"

"The yacht recognizes only one commanding authority."

Violet stepped toward the central command position.

"I programmed her that way."

She smiled faintly.

"I may have built the bridge..."

"...but she belongs to you."

Scarlett stood silently for a moment.

Then she slowly approached the central console.

The holographic displays gently brightened.

A calm female voice filled the bridge.

"Welcome aboard, Scarlett Corvina."

"Command authority confirmed."

"All systems ready."

Bianca looked at Violet with wide eyes.

"...She knows her."

"Of course she does."

Violet grinned.

"I'd be rather disappointed if she didn't."

Scarlett hesitated.

"I've never commanded a ship."

"You don't have to."

"The ship will assist you."

Violet nodded toward the harbour outside.

"Go ahead."

Scarlett looked through the panoramic windows.

The marina lay peacefully beneath the afternoon sun.

Countless smaller yachts surrounded them.

People paused along the waterfront, many already pointing toward the enormous red vessel.

She smiled.

"Well..."

She looked toward her friends.

"Let's go."

For a heartbeat...

...nothing happened.

Then the AI answered.

"Departure acknowledged."

"Releasing mooring lines."

Far below, thick ropes detached automatically.

"Bow thrusters active."

A gentle vibration passed through the deck.

"So quietly..." Naomi whispered.

The yacht began moving.

Not with a roar.

Not with a jolt.

It simply...

...glided.

Almost imperceptibly, the marina started drifting past the panoramic windows.

The water rippled silently alongside the hull.

The city slowly began to recede.

Bianca hurried to the glass.

"We're moving!"

She pressed both hands against the window like an excited child.

"We're actually moving!"

Scarlett joined her.

Neither spoke.

They simply watched as the harbour grew smaller.

For years, Scarlett Heels had existed inside offices, workshops and boutiques.

Every important decision had been made on land.

Now those familiar buildings slipped farther and farther into the distance.

Naomi folded her arms.

"It feels strange."

Scarlett nodded.

"It does."

"Are we leaving everything behind?"

Violet shook her head.

"No."

She looked around the magnificent bridge.

"We're taking everything that matters with us."

Silence settled over the room.

Not an uncomfortable silence.

A peaceful one.

Outside, the open sea slowly replaced the crowded harbour.

The horizon widened.

The water stretched endlessly ahead.

Bianca finally turned around.

"So..."

A smile spread across her face.

"Where are we going first?"

Scarlett laughed.

"I have absolutely no idea."

Violet's eyes sparkled.

"Excellent."

She gestured toward the doors.

"Then let me introduce you to your new home."

Together, the Four Pillars left the bridge.

Behind them, the MS Scarlett Heels continued her graceful voyage toward the open sea.

Chapter 56 - A Palace at Sea

The bridge doors closed silently behind them.

For a moment no one spoke.

Bianca looked once more through the panoramic glass at the endless ocean before reluctantly following Violet into another corridor.

"I still can't believe we're actually sailing."

Violet smiled.

"That's the nice thing about reality."

"It keeps surprising us."

They entered a wide hallway flooded with natural light.

Unlike the bridge, this part of the yacht felt warm rather than futuristic.

Polished walnut walls alternated with marble columns.

Golden indirect lighting traced elegant lines along the ceiling.

Floor-to-ceiling windows transformed the sea into moving artwork.

Bianca slowly walked beside the glass.

"It doesn't even feel like we're inside."

"Exactly," Violet replied.

"Scarlett wanted the ocean to be part of the interior."

Naomi gently touched one of the window frames.

"There are no vibrations."

"There are," Violet corrected.

"You just don't notice them."

Scarlett smiled.

"I like that answer."

Violet stopped before an enormous staircase.

Bianca looked up.

"...Oh..."

The staircase rose through several decks beneath a magnificent crystal dome.

Floating rings of warm golden light surrounded the chandelier like elegant halos.

The marble steps seemed almost too beautiful to walk on.

Scarlett slowly placed a hand on the polished railing.

"This wasn't here before."

"No."

Violet smiled proudly.

"It became the heart of the ship."

Bianca slowly climbed a few steps before turning around.

"I feel like a princess."

Scarlett laughed.

"I was thinking exactly the same thing."

Naomi looked thoughtfully across the open atrium.

"It's impossible to get lost."

"That wasn't an accident," Violet explained.

"From almost everywhere aboard the yacht, you can orient yourself using this staircase."

Scarlett nodded approvingly.

"So even the architecture has a purpose."

"Everything has a purpose."

They continued upward.

The next deck opened into an elegant lounge unlike any hotel Scarlett had ever visited.

Comfortable seating groups overlooked the sea.

Bookshelves reached from floor to ceiling.

A grand piano stood near the panoramic windows.

Fresh flowers decorated every table.

There wasn't a single television.

Bianca noticed immediately.

"Where are the screens?"

Violet smiled.

"There aren't any."

"Really?"

"We spend enough time looking at displays while working."

She gestured around the lounge.

"This room exists for conversations."

Scarlett slowly nodded.

"I like that philosophy."

Naomi walked toward the piano.

"Does anyone actually play?"

Bianca raised a guilty hand.

"I know three songs."

Scarlett laughed.

"Then you'll be our official ship pianist."

"Oh no."

"Oh yes."

Everyone laughed.

They continued through another corridor.

Glass walls revealed a beautifully equipped fitness studio.

Naomi stopped immediately.

Her eyes lit up.

"This..."

She walked closer to the glass.

"...is incredible."

Rows of modern equipment overlooked the ocean.

A separate stretching area occupied one side.

Beyond it lay a martial arts room with mirrored walls.

Bianca looked sideways at Naomi.

"I think we just lost her."

Naomi didn't answer.

She was already mentally planning tomorrow's workout.

Scarlett smiled knowingly.

"I'll see you here every morning."

Naomi finally nodded.

"Probably."

"Definitely," Bianca corrected.

They walked on.

Another set of doors opened.

A breathtaking dining room appeared before them.

A long elegant table dominated the space beneath a ceiling of sparkling crystal lights.

The sea surrounded the room on three sides.

Every seat offered an uninterrupted ocean view.

Bianca slowly circled the table.

"How many people fit here?"

"Twenty-four," Violet answered.

"But we'll usually be just the four of us."

Bianca looked around the enormous room.

"That feels..."

"...strangely wonderful."

Scarlett gently touched the back of one of the chairs.

"This ship was never built to impress strangers."

She smiled at her friends.

"It was built for us."

No one replied.

No answer was necessary.

After a few quiet moments, Violet clapped her hands together.

"Now..."

A mischievous smile appeared on her face.

"I've saved the best part for last."

Bianca immediately brightened.

"There's something even better?"

"Oh yes."

She led them through another corridor.

Sunlight became brighter with every step.

A warm breeze drifted inside.

The scent of the ocean filled the air.

The automatic doors opened.

The four women stepped outside.

Before them stretched an enormous deck unlike anything they had expected.

The infinity pool shimmered beneath the afternoon sun.

Elegant sun loungers lined polished teak walkways.

Palm trees swayed gently in oversized white stone planters.

A ruby-red bar overlooked the sea.

Beyond it, surrounded by graceful silver columns, stood a broad open structure with a gleaming ruby-tiled floor.

Above it, integrated seamlessly into the ceiling, was an intricate arrangement of polished metal and crystal.

Bianca tilted her head.

"What is that?"

Violet smiled.

"That..."

"...is the Aqua Lounge."

Bianca studied it curiously.

"It doesn't look like a lounge."

Scarlett laughed softly.

"I was just about to say exactly the same thing."

Violet merely smiled.

"You'll find out soon enough."

Bianca narrowed her eyes.

"I don't like that smile."

"You will."

The four women continued toward the mysterious structure as the afternoon sun glittered across the endless blue ocean.

Chapter 57 - The Aqua Lounge

Bianca slowed her pace.

She walked around the strange structure once.

Then a second time.

"It still doesn't look like a lounge."

Naomi examined the polished silver columns.

"No chairs."

Scarlett looked upward.

"No roof either."

Violet folded her arms, clearly enjoying herself.

"Any theories?"

Bianca pointed toward the ruby-red tiled floor.

"Maybe... an outdoor dance floor?"

Naomi shook her head.

"Too slippery."

Scarlett smiled.

"An art installation?"

Violet's grin grew even wider.

"Interesting."

"But wrong."

Bianca stepped into the center of the structure.

The ruby-red tiles gleamed beneath her heels.

Around her, the silver columns reached upward to a broad canopy made of polished metal and crystal.

Everything looked immaculate.

Everything looked expensive.

Everything looked...

"...unused."

She frowned.

"If this is a lounge..."

"...where exactly do you lounge?"

Violet casually pointed toward a small crystal pedestal near one of the columns.

"You could always press one of the buttons."

Scarlett immediately looked at her.

"Violet."

"What?"

"You know exactly what's going to happen."

"I do."

"And you're encouraging her?"

"I might be."

Bianca had already reached the pedestal.

Embedded beneath the crystal surface was a row of elegant illuminated symbols.

A water droplet.

A wave.

A circle.

Several others she couldn't identify.

She looked back.

"Which one?"

Violet shrugged innocently.

"Your choice."

Scarlett laughed.

"This is either going to be wonderful..."

"...or very expensive."

Bianca hesitated for exactly three seconds.

Then curiosity won.

She pressed the button with the water droplet.

Nothing happened.

She looked around.

"See?"

"I told you—"

A soft chime echoed across the pool deck.

"Program initiated."

Bianca blinked.

"...Program?"

Tiny nozzles slowly descended from the canopy overhead.

Naomi looked upward.

"I don't think that's decorative."

Another gentle voice filled the air.

"Aqua Lounge sequence."

"Preparing rainfall."

Bianca's eyes widened.

"...Rainfall?"

Scarlett took one careful step backward.

"Bianca..."

"I don't think—"

The ceiling exploded into water.

A perfectly even curtain of warm rain cascaded down across the entire structure.

Bianca disappeared behind it with a startled squeal.

"Aaaah!"

A split second later powerful side jets burst from the silver columns.

Water crossed the lounge from every direction.

Scarlett had just enough time to laugh—

before one of the side jets caught her directly.

"Oh!"

Within seconds all four women were completely soaked.

Ruby hair clung to Scarlett's shoulders.

Violet's violet streaks darkened almost black.

Naomi instinctively tried to shield Bianca—

which merely resulted in both of them receiving even more water.

Bianca stood in the middle of the artificial rain laughing so hard she could barely breathe.

"I'm sorry!"

She laughed again.

"I didn't know!"

"You absolutely didn't," Scarlett replied between bursts of laughter.

Another fountain suddenly erupted beneath Naomi's feet.

She jumped backwards with surprising speed.

Bianca stared.

"Naomi..."

"...did you just lose a fight against a shower?"

Naomi looked down at the water surrounding her shoes.

"...Possibly."

That only made Bianca laugh harder.

Even Violet had to lean against one of the columns.

"I spent a week programming this."

She wiped water from her face.

"And somehow..."

"...this is exactly how I imagined the first demonstration."

Scarlett looked around the magnificent shower.

The warm rain.

The sparkling crystal canopy.

The polished ruby floor reflecting four laughing women.

She slowly shook her head.

"You named this..."

"...the Aqua Lounge?"

Violet nodded proudly.

"Because 'Giant Luxury Shower' lacked elegance."

Scarlett burst into laughter again.

"I'll allow it."

The rainfall gradually softened.

The side jets shut down one after another.

Finally only a few drops fell from the crystal canopy.

Silence returned to the pool deck.

The four women looked at one another.

Every hairstyle ruined.

Every dress soaked.

Every one of them dripping from head to toe.

For one perfectly still second...

...they tried to remain dignified.

It lasted less than a heartbeat.

Bianca started giggling.

Naomi smiled.

Violet laughed.

Scarlett finally surrendered completely.

The laughter echoed across the open sea.

It carried over the endless water.

Far behind them, the coastline had almost disappeared.

Scarlett looked at her three friends.

Her smile became softer.

"I think..."

She glanced around the magnificent yacht.

"...it finally feels lived in."

Naomi nodded.

"It does."

Bianca looked down at the puddle surrounding her heels.

"So..."

She grinned mischievously.

"...who wants to discover the next button?"

Three voices answered simultaneously.

"No!"

Bianca's innocent smile only grew wider.

Chapter 58 - New Horizons

The afternoon faded into evening.

After the unexpected Aqua Lounge incident, nobody had been in any hurry.

Since they were already soaked from head to toe, Scarlett had simply smiled.

"I think changing can wait."

Bianca's eyes lit up.

"You mean..."

Scarlett nodded toward the shimmering infinity pool.

"We're already dressed for swimming."

Less than a minute later, four pairs of high heels stood neatly beside the pool.

A sight so unusual that Bianca stopped and stared.

"I've never seen us without heels."

Naomi looked down at her bare feet.

"...Neither have I."

They laughed.

The cool water welcomed them.

For the next hour, business ceased to exist.

There were no meetings.

No decisions.

No plans.

Only laughter.

Bianca insisted on racing Naomi across the pool.

She lost spectacularly.

Violet floated peacefully near the edge, enjoying the gentle motion of the sea beneath them.

Scarlett watched the three younger women with quiet satisfaction.

This was exactly what she had hoped the yacht would become.

Not simply a headquarters.

A home.

Eventually they returned to their cabins.

Fresh evening dresses replaced the soaked ones.

Hair was restyled.

Makeup carefully renewed.

The day's excitement slowly transformed into elegant calm.

Dinner was served as the sun began touching the horizon.

The great dining room glowed in warm golden light.

Outside, the ocean reflected countless shades of orange, crimson and violet.

The enormous table that had seemed almost too large earlier now felt surprisingly intimate.

The four women raised their glasses.

Scarlett smiled.

"To Mrs. Bellamy."

The others lifted their glasses.

"To Mrs. Bellamy."

Without her, none of this would have existed.

Scarlett turned toward Violet.

"And to the woman who somehow managed to turn a yacht into the most beautiful office on Earth."

Violet smiled modestly.

"I only improved what was already there."

Bianca laughed.

"You built a spaceship."

Naomi nodded.

"She's right."

Violet finally accepted the compliment with a quiet smile.

"Thank you."

For a while they simply enjoyed the meal.

Good food.

Good company.

The endless ocean surrounding them.

At one point Bianca looked around the room.

"You know..."

"I've never felt this relaxed before."

Naomi looked out through the panoramic windows.

"It already feels like we've lived here for years."

Scarlett nodded.

"I was hoping someone would say that."

After dinner none of them felt like going inside.

The evening air was warm.

A gentle breeze accompanied them as they wandered across the upper decks.

The sea had become perfectly calm.

Above them, the first stars slowly appeared.

Far behind, the coastline had disappeared completely.

There was only ocean now.

Ahead.

Behind.

On every side.

Bianca stopped.

"Oh..."

The others looked toward her.

She was pointing forward.

"The bow."

The graceful lines of the yacht stretched toward the darkening horizon.

Without saying a word, Scarlett began walking.

The others instinctively followed, a respectful distance behind.

She reached the very front of the ship.

The wind caught her ruby-red hair.

The ocean stretched endlessly before her.

There was no destination in sight.

Only possibility.

She thought of a nineteen-year-old student sitting alone with a notebook.

A dream.

A business plan.

Years of rejection.

Mrs. Bellamy's faith.

Violet's brilliance.

Naomi's strength.

Bianca's joy.

Every step had led here.

Not to a yacht.

Not to success.

But to this moment.

To the family standing quietly behind her.

Scarlett smiled.

She spread her arms.

Chapter 59 - A Life Well Lived

Morning sunlight shimmered across the calm sea, painting golden reflections onto the panoramic windows of the MS Scarlett Heels. Beyond the glass stretched nothing but blue water and an endless horizon. Inside, however, another world had already awakened.

The headquarters on land had opened hours ago.

Production lines were running.

Boutiques welcomed customers.

Meetings were beginning across several continents.

And from somewhere in the Indian Ocean, the Scarlett Heels Family quietly guided it all.

Scarlett stood in her Executive Office before a wall-sized display showing the latest design renderings. One graceful movement of her hand enlarged a new heel silhouette while another screen displayed live production figures from Europe.

Across the corridor, Violet was already immersed in a video conference.

"...Yes, increase the Italian production by eight percent."

A brief pause.

"No, don't extend the delivery time. Redistribute the manufacturing schedule instead."

Another pause.

"The software has already calculated the optimal sequence."

She smiled faintly.

"I'll send you the revised schedule in thirty seconds."

She ended the call.

Before she had even set down her tablet, the updated plan had already arrived in every department that needed it.

Business flowed as smoothly as the ocean outside.

Meanwhile, Naomi was in the gym.

She tightened the strap of one of the training machines before beginning another circuit.

Her elegant black training outfit looked as refined as anything Scarlett herself would have designed. On her feet were sleek black Scarlett Heels—perfectly balanced, perfectly familiar.

Months ago, she had wondered how anyone could move confidently in heels.

Now she barely noticed them.

She finished another set before wiping her forehead with a towel.

The intercom chimed softly.

"Naomi?"

Violet.

"Yes?"

"The conference room is ready."

"I'll be there."

Naomi looked around the empty gym.

"...How do you know where I am?"

A tiny pause.

"I checked the schedule."

Naomi smiled.

"That's a much less frightening answer than I expected."

"I've been trying to sound less frightening."

"It works."

"...Good."

Naomi chuckled to herself.

The morning passed in a comfortable rhythm.

Video meetings.

Design reviews.

Financial reports.

Supplier negotiations.

New boutique concepts.

The work never stopped.

Neither did the satisfaction that came from seeing years of effort grow into something extraordinary.

At lunch, the four women gathered on the shaded aft deck.

Naomi closed the conference room door and stretched.

"Lunch?"

Bianca's eyes lit up.

"I was hoping you'd ask."

The galley was already humming softly.

Violet's automation had long since taken over the tedious work.

Ingredients were chilled at exactly the right temperature, supplies replenished automatically, recipes projected onto the work surface whenever someone wanted them.

Scarlett often joked that the kitchen could prepare dinner without them.

Fortunately...

...it almost never had to.

Naomi tied a black apron around her waist.

Bianca slipped into a blush-pink one.

"What are we making?"

Naomi opened the refrigerator.

"Something with salmon."

"And mango."

Naomi looked at her.

"...Mango?"

Bianca grinned.

"Trust me."

An hour later the four of them were eating on the aft deck.

Scarlett took another bite.

"I have absolutely no idea why salmon and mango work together."

Naomi looked at Bianca.

"...Neither do I."

Bianca smiled.

"But they do."

"They do."

The ocean breeze carried away the last traces of the morning's work.

Scarlett leaned back in her chair.

"I still can't believe we're discussing international expansion while crossing the Indian Ocean."

Violet looked up from her tablet.

"Technically we're discussing Southeast Asia."

Scarlett laughed.

"I know."

Bianca never sat down for long.

She wandered around the table, stopping behind Scarlett.

"Oh dear..."

Scarlett looked up.

"What?"

Bianca gently brushed an almost invisible strand of ruby-red hair back into place.

"There."

Scarlett smiled.

"Much better?"

Bianca nodded with complete seriousness.

"Much."

She continued her little inspection.

Violet wasn't spared either.

"Turn your head."

Violet obediently turned.

Bianca adjusted the fall of a single lock of black hair with violet streaks and smoothed the collar of her blouse.

"Perfect."

Naomi watched the scene with amusement.

"You're inspecting us."

Bianca looked genuinely puzzled.

"No..."

She walked over to Naomi.

"...you just all look so disarranged."

Naomi raised an eyebrow.

"Disarranged?"

Bianca nodded earnestly.

"Just tiny things."

She straightened Naomi's ponytail by perhaps half a centimeter.

Smoothed an almost invisible wrinkle from her shoulder.

Took one small step back.

Tilted her head.

"...There."

Naomi looked at Scarlett.

"Can you tell the difference?"

Scarlett smiled.

"No."

Violet looked up from her tablet.

"Neither can I."

Bianca beamed.

"Wonderful."

Naomi frowned.

"...Wonderful?"

Bianca laughed.

"That means I did it right."

The afternoon belonged to Naomi.

She insisted on keeping everyone fit.

"No excuses."

Scarlett sighed dramatically.

"I am the CEO."

Naomi nodded.

"Correct."

"Doesn't that count for anything?"

"It means you do the full program."

Bianca giggled.

"I like her management style."

Violet quietly finished the warm-up before anyone else had stopped talking.

Naomi noticed.

"You've been practicing."

"A little."

"A little?"

"I optimized my movement patterns."

Scarlett shook her head.

"Only Violet would improve at exercise by writing better algorithms."

"I didn't write algorithms."

"What did you write?"

"A simulation."

Naomi blinked.

"...Of squats?"

"So I wouldn't perform inefficient ones."

Bianca laughed so hard she had to sit down on a bench.

An hour later, all four were floating lazily in the pool.

The workday was over.

No presentations.

No deadlines.

No decisions.

Only gentle waves and warm afternoon sunshine.

Scarlett drifted beside Violet, absent mindedly intertwining their fingers beneath the water.

Neither of them said a word.

They didn't need to.

Nearby, Bianca rested comfortably against Naomi's shoulder.

Naomi pretended not to notice.

After a few minutes, she adjusted her position ever so slightly, making it easier for Bianca to lean against her.

Bianca smiled without opening her eyes.

"Thank you."

Naomi answered with a quiet hum.

For another minute they simply floated.

Then Bianca's eyes opened.

She frowned.

"Hold on..."

The others looked at her.

Scarlett smiled.

"What?"

Bianca counted on her fingers.

"Scarlett had Iceland."

"Violet had Brazil."

"I had Greenland."

She suddenly sat upright.

"Naomi!"

Naomi looked puzzled.

"What about me?"

"You never had your own campaign."

Silence.

Then all three looked at Naomi.

She blinked.

Bianca was already thinking aloud.

"You need something..."

"...dangerous."

Violet grinned.

"Thigh boots."

Bianca's eyes lit up.

"Yes!"

Scarlett tilted her head.

"Black."

Naomi slowly smiled.

"I can work with black."

Bianca became more enthusiastic by the second.

"A jungle."

Violet shook her head.

"Too predictable."

"A panther."

Bianca gasped dramatically.

"No."

She spread both arms.

"Two panthers!"

For a moment nobody said anything.

Then all four burst into laughter.

Naomi leaned back into the water again.

"You girls are insane."

Scarlett smiled.

"We know."

Bianca grinned.

"...but admit it."

Naomi looked at the blue sky.

A slow smile crossed her face.

"...two panthers..."

She closed her eyes again.

"...could work."

Evening brought another elegant dinner.

Candles flickered softly.

The yacht glided almost silently across the darkening sea.

Conversation wandered effortlessly from future shoe designs to

favorite beaches, from travel plans to amusing stories from the company's early days.

"Let's visit the Seychelles ... or the Maldives."

But nothing felt rushed.

Nothing felt forced.

It was simply home.

Much later, Naomi walked down the quiet corridor toward her cabin.

Bianca appeared behind her.

"You forgot something."

"What?"

"Your shower."

Naomi looked at herself.

"Oh."

She had become so comfortable aboard the yacht that she'd nearly gone straight to bed after training.

"Go."

Bianca smiled.

"I'll see you after."

A quick kiss landed on Naomi's cheek before Bianca disappeared around the corner.

Naomi smiled to herself.

"...Yes, ma'am."

Warm water cascaded gently from the broad rain shower.

Naomi closed her eyes for a long moment, letting the day's remaining

tension disappear.

Only when she shifted her weight did she hear it.

A soft splash.

She frowned.

Looked down.

Black Scarlett Heels.

Still on her feet.

For a second she simply stared at them.

Then she laughed quietly.

She slipped them off, holding one in each hand.

A thoughtful smile spread across her face.

"I didn't even notice."

She set them carefully beside the shower.

Outside, the ocean rolled endlessly beneath a sky full of stars.

Inside, Naomi realized something she had never expected.

Luxury no longer felt unfamiliar.

It simply felt like home.

DARE

*Confidence is not given.
It is taken.*



Created for women who
don't ask for permission.
They set the standard.
They lead.

DARE is the embodiment of
power, precision, and presence.
A silhouette engineered to
challenge limits and
command every room.

The 130 mm stiletto heel,
forged in titanium, cuts
through the ordinary.
Its faceted structure catches
the light—like black diamond.

A shoe for those who
walk first, so others
can follow.



*No limits.
No hesitation.
Only you.
Only DARE.
Only perfection.*



SCARLETT HEELS
— DARE —

Crafted by Hand. Inspired by Women. Driven by Desire.



Chapter 61 - Bianca's Gift

The morning began with laughter.

Scarlett stood before the large mirror in her dressing room, fastening a pair of ruby earrings before an important video interview with an international fashion magazine.

She picked up a second pair.

"Hm..."

Before she could decide, Bianca appeared in the doorway.

"Those."

Scarlett looked up.

"I didn't even ask."

"You were going to."

Scarlett smiled and held up both pairs.

"The larger ones?"

Bianca shook her head.

"They're beautiful."

"And?"

"They'll compete with your lipstick."

Scarlett slowly lowered them.

"The smaller pair?"

Bianca nodded.

"They'll make people look at you instead of your jewellery."

Scarlett clipped them into place.

She studied herself in the mirror for a moment.

"...You're right."

"I know."

The final meeting connection was about to close when the marketing director smiled.

"One last question. Are we officially announcing the location of next year's Foundation Party?"

Scarlett glanced at Violet.

Violet gave an almost imperceptible nod.

Scarlett smiled.

"Yes."

"Sydney."

The announcement was met with enthusiastic smiles around the conference table.

"We'll begin preparations immediately."

Bianca looked up from the sofa.

"Wait."

Violet obediently stopped.

"What?"

Bianca walked around her once.

"Your jacket."

Violet looked down.

"What about it?"

"The collar folded inward."

She reached up, straightened it with practised fingers, then adjusted a single strand of violet-streaked hair.

"There."

Violet smiled.

"Thank you."

She didn't even look in the mirror.

She simply continued down the corridor.

Naomi watched her disappear.

"...You didn't check."

Violet shrugged.

"I didn't need to."

By lunchtime the pattern had repeated itself countless times.

A bracelet.

A lipstick shade.

A hairstyle.

A necklace clasp.

Tiny details.

None of them dramatic.

Yet somehow Bianca always noticed them.

And somehow everyone had long ago stopped questioning her advice.

That afternoon Scarlett presented the newest shoe concepts to the headquarters.

Four enormous displays filled the conference wall.

Managers from Milan, Paris, New York and Tokyo appeared in neatly arranged windows.

The discussion lasted almost two hours.

When the final connection closed, Scarlett leaned back with a satisfied smile.

"Excellent."

Violet nodded.

"The production schedule is already updated."

Naomi stretched her shoulders.

"I'll never get used to attending board meetings in the middle of the ocean."

"You say that every week," Scarlett said.

"And every week it's true."

Bianca giggled.

The rest of the afternoon belonged to the sun.

The pool shimmered beneath a cloudless sky.

Scarlett floated peacefully beside Violet, their fingers finding each other beneath the water as naturally as breathing.

On the opposite side, Naomi sat with her feet in the water while Bianca rested comfortably against her shoulder.

Bianca suddenly looked up.

"Hold still."

Naomi sighed.

"What now?"

"A tiny bit of sunscreen."

"I already used some."

"I know."

Bianca dabbed a little onto the bridge of Naomi's nose.

"There."

Naomi looked at Scarlett.

"Does it make a difference?"

Scarlett smiled.

"Not that I can see."

Bianca folded her arms with mock indignation.

"Exactly."

Naomi laughed.

"I'll never understand you."

"You don't have to."

Bianca kissed her gently on the cheek.

"You just have to let me."

Naomi's answer was a quiet smile.

That evening the four women gathered for dinner beneath the soft golden light of the Grand Hall.

Conversation wandered easily from future travel plans to the next Foundation Party.

At one point Scarlett simply watched the others.

Violet discussing color combinations with Bianca.

Naomi patiently allowing Bianca to inspect her ponytail for perhaps the tenth time that day.

Nobody complained.

Nobody even seemed surprised any more.

Scarlett smiled to herself.

She had noticed something.

After dessert she placed her napkin beside her plate.

"I have something to show you."

Bianca tilted her head.

"What is it?"

"You'll see."

Scarlett led them down one of the quieter corridors of the yacht until they reached a door Naomi was certain had been locked only yesterday.

Scarlett produced a polished brass key.

The lock clicked.

She slowly pushed the door open.

Warm light spilled into the corridor.

Bianca stepped inside.

Her eyes widened.

Elegant mirrors stretched along one wall.

Professional styling chairs stood before softly illuminated vanities.

Beautiful walnut cabinets displayed cosmetics arranged with almost artistic precision.

Rows of nail colours shimmered beneath crystal lighting.

There were makeup stations.

Hair styling equipment.

Comfortable consultation chairs.

Jewellery displays.

Fresh flowers.

Everything finished in the unmistakable Scarlett Heels style.

For several seconds Bianca couldn't speak.

Scarlett walked over and placed the small brass key into Bianca's hand.

"For months," she said softly, "you've been taking care of all of us."

Bianca stared at the key.

"I only..."

"You never had to ask."

Scarlett smiled.

"You simply saw what we needed."

Violet stepped beside Bianca.

"I stopped choosing my lipstick months ago."

Naomi nodded.

"And I haven't fixed my own ponytail in weeks."

Scarlett laughed.

"Neither of us noticed when it happened."

Bianca looked from one woman to the next.

"...Really?"

Scarlett nodded.

"You've become our beauty expert."

A tear formed in Bianca's eye.

Scarlett gently closed Bianca's fingers around the key.

"So every expert deserves a place to practice her craft."

Bianca looked around the beautiful room once more.

"...This is mine?"

Scarlett's eyes sparkled.

"This is your Beauty Salon."

Silence.

Then Bianca suddenly threw her arms around Scarlett.

"Oh my God..."

Scarlett returned the embrace.

"We thought you'd like it."

Bianca laughed through happy tears.

"Like it?"

She looked around the room again, still hardly believing it.

"I love it."

Naomi slipped an arm around Bianca's waist.

Violet smiled, resting a gentle hand on Bianca's shoulder.

For a long moment, the four women simply stood there together.

Outside, the ocean carried the MS Scarlett Heels steadily toward the Seychelles.

Inside, another dream had quietly found its place.

Chapter 62 - Seychelles

The evening sun painted the Seychelles in warm shades of gold as the four women relaxed on the upper deck.

For a while, nobody spoke.

Music drifted over the deck. The new hit of Eden.

Bianca hummed along.

Violet stretched comfortably in her chair and smiled.

"I just love the Seychelles."

Scarlett looked at her over the rim of her wine glass.

"So..."

"...you want to see something new?"

Violet laughed.

"You do know me by now, don't you?"

Before Scarlett could answer, Bianca raised her hand enthusiastically.

"Maldives!"

Everybody laughed.

Scarlett shook her head.

"I knew that was coming."

Bianca grinned.

"What? They're beautiful."

"They are," Scarlett admitted.

"But if we stop everywhere you want to visit, we'll arrive in Sydney sometime around 2035."

Naomi took a sip of sparkling water.

"...Optimistic."

More laughter.

Bianca pouted dramatically.

"Fine..."

"...then where are we going next?"

Scarlett leaned back and looked toward Violet.

"Our navigator?"

Violet touched the tabletop display.

A three-dimensional map rose silently from its surface.

The Indian Ocean glowed beneath countless tiny lights marking islands, ports and shipping routes.

"Our original plan," Violet said, "was to leave for Australia after another month."

She zoomed out.

"But..."

Scarlett smiled.

"There's a 'but.'"

"There usually is."

Violet's eyes wandered across the map.

"We've spent almost two months around the Seychelles."

Naomi raised an eyebrow.

"Has it really been that long?"

Bianca looked genuinely surprised.

"It feels like yesterday."

Scarlett smiled softly.

"That's usually a sign you've been happy."

Silence settled for a moment.

A comfortable silence.

Finally Scarlett looked back at the map.

"So..."

"...where do we go?"

Violet's fingers drifted slowly eastward across the ocean.

Past tiny island chains.

Past shipping lanes.

Until they stopped.

"The Maldives."

Bianca threw both arms into the air.

"YES!"

Naomi laughed.

"I had a feeling this meeting was rigged."

"It wasn't," Violet said innocently.

Scarlett looked at Bianca's glowing face.

Then at Naomi, who was already smiling despite herself.

Then at Violet.

Finally she nodded.

"The Maldives it is."

Bianca jumped up and hugged Scarlett first.

Then Violet.

Then Naomi.

Naomi chuckled.

"I suppose I don't get a vote anymore."

Bianca looked up at her.

"You just voted."

"I did?"

"You smiled."

Naomi sighed with exaggerated resignation.

"...I've got to stop doing that."

"You really don't," Bianca whispered before giving her a quick kiss.

Far below, the gentle wake of the MS Scarlett Heels stretched across the calm sea.

Ahead lay the Maldives.

Beyond them...

...Australia.

And after that...

Who knew?

Chapter 63 - A Little Detour

A week later, the turquoise lagoons of the Maldives slowly disappeared behind the stern of the MS Scarlett Heels.

Another wonderful week.

Another paradise reluctantly left behind.

Bianca leaned against the polished railing, watching the last tiny islands fade into the horizon.

"I could stay there forever."

Naomi folded her arms.

"You said that about the Seychelles."

"I know."

"And you'll say it about the next place."

"...Probably."

Naomi smiled.

"...Fair enough."

Life aboard the yacht settled effortlessly back into its familiar rhythm.

Morning meetings.

Video conferences with headquarters.

Naomi's relentless workouts.

Bianca's cheerful inspections.

Cooking together in the galley.

Music seemed to accompany almost everything now.

More often than not...

...it was Eden.

Bianca sang along while preparing dinner.

Violet quietly joined in whenever she thought nobody was listening.

Even Scarlett occasionally caught herself humming a chorus while sketching a new heel.

Only Naomi remained loyal to her own playlists.

Heavy guitar riffs echoed from the gym almost every morning.

Bianca sighed dramatically.

"You are impossible."

Naomi adjusted the volume.

"I've worked hard to achieve that."

One afternoon Scarlett sat alone in her office.

The yacht glided peacefully through calm seas while another video conference had just ended.

She closed the last production report.

A small advertisement appeared in the corner of her screen.

EDEN

Singapore

One Exclusive Concert

Scarlett smiled.

"...Well..."

A few clicks later she discovered that every regular seat had already been sold.

Only one option remained.

VIP Lounge.

She looked at the price.

Raised one eyebrow.

Then smiled again.

"...Bianca is going to lose her mind."

She confirmed the booking.

Four tickets.

Afterward she closed the browser as casually as if nothing had happened.

The following morning everyone gathered for breakfast on the aft deck.

Fresh fruit.

Warm croissants.

Freshly brewed coffee.

Bianca placed another plate onto the table before sitting beside Naomi.

Scarlett buttered a croissant.

"I've been thinking."

The other three looked up.

"I'd like to make a short stop in Singapore."

Violet nodded almost immediately.

"Good idea."

Naomi shrugged.

"Works for me."

Bianca smiled.

"Ooh... shopping."

Scarlett laughed.

"I suspected that might convince you."

Nobody asked another question.

Several days later the skyline of Singapore rose from the morning haze.

Glass towers reflected the sunlight.

Countless ships waited outside one of the busiest harbours in the world.

The MS Scarlett Heels slipped gracefully toward its berth.

Bianca stood at the panoramic windows.

"I've never seen anything like this."

Scarlett smiled.

"It gets better."

That evening a sleek black limousine rolled silently through the illuminated streets.

Bianca watched the city glide past outside the window.

"So..."

"...where are we going?"

Scarlett smiled mysteriously.

"You'll see."

Naomi looked at Bianca.

"I have a feeling we're not going shopping."

The limousine turned one final corner.

Then slowed.

Bianca looked through the window.

A giant illuminated poster covered the front of an enormous arena.

EDEN

SOLD OUT

She blinked.

"...Wait."

Another banner.

The same name.

Thousands of fans filled the plaza outside.

Bianca slowly turned toward Scarlett.

"...Scarlett..."

Scarlett reached into her handbag.

"I think these belong to you."

She held up four elegant black-and-gold passes.

VIP LOUNGE

For a heartbeat Bianca simply stared.

Then realisation exploded across her face.

"Oh..."

"Oh my God..."

"You..."

"...you didn't!"

Scarlett couldn't help smiling.

"I might have."

Bianca practically launched herself across the limousine and wrapped Scarlett in a crushing hug.

"This is the best surprise ever!"

Scarlett laughed.

"I thought you might enjoy it."

"Might enjoy it?"

Bianca looked ready to burst with happiness.

"I've dreamed about seeing Eden live!"

Naomi glanced toward the endless queue stretching around the arena.

"You three go ahead."

Bianca immediately looked at her.

"What?"

"I'll wait somewhere."

"Naomi..."

"I'll only spend two hours wondering when the guitars start."

Bianca gently took both of Naomi's hands.

"Please."

Naomi smiled patiently.

"I don't even know her songs."

"You came shopping with me."

"True."

"You let me redesign your ponytail."

"...Also true."

"You survived both."

Naomi chuckled.

"Barely."

Bianca stepped closer.

"Please?"

Naomi looked into those hopeful sapphire-blue eyes for several long seconds.

Finally she sighed.

"...Fine."

Bianca's smile became even brighter.

"You'll come?"

"I'm coming."

"For me?"

Naomi nodded.

"For you."

Bianca stood on tiptoe and kissed her softly.

"Thank you."

Naomi smiled.

"...Just don't expect me to sing."

Scarlett quietly exchanged an amused glance with Violet.

Neither of them said a word.

Sometimes surprises turned out even better than planned.

Together, the four women stepped out of the limousine.

Above them, the enormous arena glowed with anticipation.

Chapter 64 - The Concert

Bianca awed.

"I still can't believe we're actually here."

The evening sky glowed above the stadium, reflecting countless moving beams of light that swept across the clouds. Fans streamed through the entrances wearing shirts, glowing bracelets and jackets bearing the unmistakable name everyone had come to see.

EDEN

Bianca took a deep breath.

"This is going to be incredible."

Scarlett smiled at her enthusiasm.

"I have a feeling you're right."

A hostess escorted the four women through quiet corridors far removed from the bustling crowds until they reached one of the private VIP lounges overlooking the stage.

Floor-to-ceiling glass gave them a perfect panoramic view.

A buffet had been prepared.

Champagne rested on ice.

Soft leather seating surrounded low tables, while the muffled

excitement of the stadium rose like distant thunder.

Bianca barely noticed any of it.

She was already standing at the glass.

"Oh... wow."

The stage occupied almost the entire opposite end of the stadium.

Several gigantic LED walls towered above a breathtaking arrangement of moving platforms, staircases and light bridges. Hundreds of automated spotlights rested silently, waiting for darkness to complete the illusion.

Violet studied the construction with fascination.

"That lighting rig must weigh hundreds of tons."

Naomi glanced over.

"You've been looking at the lights for thirty seconds."

"I'm trying to figure out how they're synchronised."

"You haven't even seen them move yet."

"I know."

Scarlett chuckled.

"Some people admire the performance."

She looked at Violet.

"Some admire how it's built."

Violet smiled unapologetically.

The stadium slowly filled until every seat seemed occupied.

A wave of anticipation rolled through the audience.

Thousands of glowing wristbands suddenly illuminated in perfect synchronisation.

The arena lights faded.

The crowd erupted.

Bianca grabbed Scarlett's arm.

"She's coming!"

The first notes echoed through the stadium.

Then the enormous screens burst into life.

A cascade of emerald light swept across the stage before a single silhouette appeared against the darkness.

The roar became deafening.

Eden stepped into the spotlight.

Elegant.

Confident.

Completely at ease before tens of thousands of people.

She didn't command attention.

She simply received it.

Bianca was speechless.

Scarlett found herself smiling without realizing it.

Even Naomi nodded with quiet appreciation.

"Quite a stage presence."

The show was extraordinary.

Every song unfolded like its own world.

Sometimes Eden stood alone beneath a single spotlight.

Sometimes the entire stage exploded into movement, dancers and dazzling visual effects.

Violet had almost forgotten to blink.

"The synchronisation is unbelievable."

Scarlett simply enjoyed the performance.

It was one of those rare evenings when she allowed herself to forget meetings, production schedules and international expansion.

For two hours she was simply another member of the audience.

Halfway through the concert, Eden returned to the stage wearing a different outfit.

Bianca admired the sparkling emerald costume.

Then Scarlett's eyes drifted downward.

She froze.

"...No."

Violet followed her gaze.

"What?"

Scarlett pointed almost imperceptibly.

"The shoes."

The camera switched to a close-up.

For only a few seconds, Eden's feet filled the enormous LED screens.

Elegant.

Refined.

Unmistakable.

Scarlett knew every line.

Every curve.

Every proportion.

She had drawn that silhouette herself three months earlier.

"They're ours," Scarlett whispered.

Bianca stared.

"They are..."

Violet leaned closer to the glass.

"They really are."

Naomi narrowed her eyes before giving a slow nod.

"They're definitely Scarlett Heels."

For a few silent moments none of them spoke.

Then the music changed.

A deep orchestral introduction echoed through the stadium.

The audience immediately recognised the opening of one of Eden's signature songs.

The lights dimmed.

The stage darkened.

Only Eden remained illuminated.

Behind her, the giant LED walls awakened once more.

Scarlett expected abstract graphics.

Instead...

An elegant heel slowly emerged from the darkness.

Simple.

Refined.

Graceful.

It wasn't a company logo.

There was no brand name.

No slogan.

Just the unmistakable silhouette of a Scarlett Heel, towering above the

stage like a work of art.

The audience cheered as the image became part of the performance.

Scarlett never moved.

Her eyes remained fixed on the screen.

Bianca looked from the stage to Scarlett and back again.

"...Scarlett..."

Scarlett answered almost inaudibly.

"She chose it."

No sponsorship.

No announcement.

No marketing campaign.

Eden had simply decided that this beautiful silhouette belonged in her performance.

Scarlett felt something she hadn't expected.

Pride.

Not because thousands of people were looking at her work.

Because someone she had never met had fallen in love with it.

Scarlett reached into her handbag.

She removed a simple white business card.

A passing hostess paused politely.

"Excuse me."

"Yes, Miss?"

Scarlett handed him the card.

"If possible..."

She smiled.

"...would you mind giving this to Miss Eden?"

The hostess glanced at the elegant card.

Scarlett Heels - Scarlett Corvina

She looked back up with professional composure.

"Certainly, Miss Corvina."

"Thank you."

Scarlett expected nothing more.

It was simply a gesture of appreciation.

When the final song ended, the stadium rose to its feet in thunderous applause.

Eden bowed.

Fireworks exploded above the open roof.

The lights slowly returned.

Bianca was still applauding as the crowd began making its way toward the exits.

"That was amazing."

"It really was," Scarlett agreed.

The four women left the lounge and began walking toward the private exit.

Behind them, the stadium slowly emptied into the warm evening.

None of them noticed footsteps approaching at a brisk pace.

"Miss Corvina?"

They turned.

The same hostess had caught up with them.

Slightly out of breath, she smiled.

"Miss Eden would be delighted if you and your guests would join her

backstage."

For a heartbeat, nobody said a word.

Bianca's eyes became enormous.

"...You're kidding."

The hostess smiled.

"I'm not."

She stepped aside and gestured toward a secure corridor.

"This way, please."

Chapter 65 - Backstage Arrival

The host led the four women away from the public corridors and through a discreet security door.

Instantly the atmosphere changed.

The roar of the stadium became a distant echo.

Concrete walls replaced polished marble.

Flight cases lined the hallways.

Technicians hurried past carrying headsets, cables and camera equipment, each of them moving with practised purpose.

The backstage world was every bit as impressive as the concert itself.

Violet looked around with wide eyes.

"I think I like this part even more."

Naomi smiled.

"I knew you would."

Bianca barely heard either of them.

She walked a little too quickly.

Then slowed down.

Then sped up again.

Scarlett couldn't help smiling.

"Nervous?"

"A little."

"A little?"

"...No."

She took a deep breath.

"I'm about to meet Eden."

"You've already seen her."

"That's completely different."

Scarlett laughed quietly.

"It is."

The host stopped in front of a pair of dark wooden doors.

He knocked gently.

A voice answered from inside.

"Come in."

The doors opened.

The room was surprisingly calm.

Soft lighting replaced the blinding stage effects.

Comfortable sofas stood around low tables covered with flowers and refreshments.

Several musicians chatted nearby.

Managers and assistants spoke in hushed voices.

It felt less like the backstage area of a stadium concert and more like someone's elegant living room.

The host stepped aside.

"Miss Corvina and your guests."

For a brief moment nobody moved.

Then Eden looked up.

She had changed into a relaxed version of her stage outfit.

The emerald jacket remained, now worn open over a white satin top.

Her emerald jewellery caught the warm light.

The white tips of her emerald bob framed a face that was instantly recognisable, yet somehow softer than it had appeared beneath the stadium lights.

She smiled.

Not the smile that had captivated sixty thousand people.

A genuine one.

She walked directly toward them.

"Scarlett Corvina?"

Scarlett nodded.

"I hope I didn't interrupt your evening."

Eden laughed.

"Quite the opposite."

She held up the business card.

"I've wanted to meet you ever since I saw this."

Scarlett blinked.

"My business card?"

"No."

Eden turned the card over.

"Your name."

She looked down at the Scarlett Heels logo.

"I've been wearing your shoes for two months."

Then she looked back at Scarlett.

"I honestly never imagined I'd get the chance to thank you in person."

For a moment, Scarlett didn't know what to say.

The woman whose concerts filled stadiums around the world was thanking her.

Bianca decided that silence had lasted long enough.

"Oh my God..."

Everyone turned toward her.

She clasped both hands in front of her chest.

"We are such huge fans of you!"

A brief silence followed.

Eden's smile widened.

"I had a feeling."

Bianca immediately blushed.

"Was I that obvious?"

"You applauded after every song."

"...Oh."

"And I think you sang along to all of them."

"...Maybe."

Scarlett raised an eyebrow.

"Maybe?"

Bianca sighed dramatically.

"Fine."

She looked at Eden.

"I know every single lyric."

Eden laughed.

"I appreciate the honesty."

The tension dissolved instantly.

It felt less like meeting a world-famous performer...

...and more like meeting someone who had already been a friend for years.

Only Naomi remained quietly observant.

She smiled politely.

Then shrugged.

"I'm more into Heavy Metal."

Silence.

Bianca slowly turned her head.

Scarlett closed her eyes for a split second.

Naomi...

Eden looked at Naomi with genuine curiosity.

"Really?"

Naomi nodded.

"Mostly progressive metal."

Another heartbeat passed.

Then Eden tilted her head ever so slightly.

"What did you think about the latest Evergrey album?"

Naomi stared.

"...Excuse me?"

"The latest Evergrey album."

"You... listen to Evergrey?"

Eden smiled.

"Quite a lot."

Naomi looked genuinely stunned for the first time that evening.

"I loved it."

"Me too."

Two seconds later the rest of the room had effectively disappeared.

"...The guitar tone on the second track—"

"Exactly!"

"And that chorus..."

"I know!"

Scarlett, Bianca and Violet watched the two women walk a few steps away, already deep in conversation.

Bianca blinked.

"...Did we just lose Naomi?"

Violet smiled.

"I think we did."

Scarlett watched the unlikely pair with amused disbelief.

She had expected many things from this evening.

That Naomi and Eden would disappear into an enthusiastic discussion about progressive metal...

...had definitely not been one of them.

"...and the transition into the final chorus completely caught me off guard."

Naomi nodded enthusiastically.

"Exactly! Everybody talks about the guitars, but hardly anyone notices how beautifully the keyboards build the atmosphere."

"I know!"

Eden laughed.

"I thought I was the only one."

Scarlett watched the two women with quiet amusement.

Only minutes ago they had been complete strangers.

Now they were finishing each other's sentences.

Bianca leaned toward Violet.

"I've never seen Naomi talk this much."

Violet smiled.

"I don't think Naomi has either."

Naomi looked over.

"I can hear you."

"Of course you can."

Without anyone noticing, the conversation slowly merged again.

One moment it was just Naomi and Eden.

The next, all five women were standing around one of the low tables with glasses in their hands, talking as though they had known each other for years.

There was no agenda.

No interviews.

No publicity photographs.

Just conversation.

Scarlett waited for a quiet moment.

"May I ask you something?"

Eden turned toward her.

"Of course."

Scarlett smiled.

"The shoes."

Eden looked down instinctively.

"My Scarlett Heels?"

Scarlett nodded.

"I couldn't help noticing them."

"I hoped you would."

That answer surprised everyone.

Eden laughed softly.

"I discovered Scarlett Heels two months ago."

"Only two months?"

She nodded.

"I was in Milan."

"There was a boutique nearby."

"I walked in because I thought the window display was beautiful."

Bianca listened as though every word were part of a fairy tale.

"I loved the Tailor Lounge experience."

Eden smiled at the memory.

"And the tailored shoes just fit like a glove! I immediately ordered 3 more pairs!"

Everyone laughed.

Violet explained.

"Once we got your data we can craft other models very easy."

"Two weeks later I bought two more. I haven't worn another brand since."

For a brief moment nobody spoke.

There wasn't the slightest trace of exaggeration in her voice.

She simply stated a fact.

Scarlett looked genuinely touched.

"You know..."

Eden continued,

"...people always assume someone paid me to wear them."

Scarlett looked surprised.

"Well, we didn't."

Eden joked.

"You probably couldn't afford it."

Everybody burst out laughing.

Violet's curiosity finally got the better of her.

"I hope you don't mind me asking something technical."

Eden smiled.

"Go ahead."

"How long did it take before you trusted them on stage?"

Eden answered without hesitation.

"The second rehearsal."

"So quickly?"

"They're remarkably stable."

She looked at Scarlett.

"I've performed in a lot of heels."

"Most of them look beautiful."

She paused.

"Yours are the only heels that let me forget I'm wearing heels."

Scarlett looked down for a second.

There were compliments.

And then there were compliments that reminded you why you had started creating something in the first place.

Bianca noticed the expression immediately.

She gently nudged Scarlett's shoulder.

"I think she just made your year."

Scarlett laughed.

"I think she might have."

Time quietly slipped away.

One story led to another.

Concert tours.

Funny rehearsal disasters.

Product prototypes.

Impossible engineering challenges.

Bianca somehow managed to tell the story of accidentally locking herself inside one of Scarlett Heels' prototype display cabinets.

Nobody could quite remember how that topic had come up.

Least of all Bianca.

Even Naomi laughed.

"So that's actually true?"

Bianca sighed.

"I hoped that story would never leave the company."

"I'm afraid it just did."

Eden laughed so hard that tears formed in the corners of her eyes.

"I like you people."

Scarlett smiled.

"We were just about to say the same thing."

A gentle cough interrupted the conversation.

One of Eden's tour managers stood nearby.

He looked almost apologetic.

"I'm terribly sorry."

Nobody had noticed him arrive.

"We've finished loading the last equipment."

He smiled.

"The crew would like to lock up."

Silence.

The five women looked around.

The room was almost empty.

The musicians had already left.

The catering staff were quietly collecting the last glasses.

Someone switched off another section of lights.

Outside, the distant stadium had fallen almost silent.

Bianca blinked.

"...Have we really been talking that long?"

The manager smiled.

"Quite a while."

Eden looked almost surprised herself.

"I didn't even notice."

Neither had anyone else.

They slowly stood.

Nobody seemed particularly eager to leave.

At the door, Eden smiled warmly.

"Come to my show anytime."

Scarlett returned the smile.

"Only if you promise to visit us."

"I'd love to."

"We're usually aboard the MS Scarlett Heels."

Eden took another step...

...then stopped.

She turned around.

"...The what?"

Bianca's eyes lit up.

"One hundred and fifteen meters!"

Scarlett laughed.

"Bianca..."

"What?"

"That's the impressive part!"

Naomi nodded thoughtfully.

"Technically..."

"...it's a ship."

Eden stared at them.

Then she started laughing.

"I think..."

"...I really have to see this ship."

Scarlett extended her hand.

"We'll be delighted to show you."

Eden shook it.

"It's a promise."

As the four women disappeared down the quiet backstage corridor,

Eden remained standing for another moment.

Then Bianca turned, ran back to her to give her a hug.

Eden smiled.

Bianca returned to her crew.

Eden even smiled some more.

Her manager looked at her.

"You like them."

Eden watched the corridor where they had vanished.

Then she smiled.

"I really do."

For the first time in a very long while...

...the evening had ended not with another successful concert...

...but with the beginning of four unexpected friendships.

Chapter 66 - The Last Fifteen Thousand

The office was unusually quiet that Friday afternoon.

Most of Cindy's colleagues had already left for the weekend. Bondi Beach was calling.

She finished the last customer email, shut down her computer and reached for her handbag.

A familiar notification appeared on her phone.

Scarlett Heels Newsletter

A smile immediately spread across her face.

She opened it without hesitation.

The headline filled the screen.

Foundation Party 2023 – Sydney

For a moment she simply stared.

Sydney.

Her city.

She read the sentence again.

And again.

A laugh escaped her.

"No way..."

She pressed both hands against her mouth.

"They're coming here..."

For years she had accepted that every Foundation Party would probably be somewhere she could never afford to visit.

Paris.

Milan.

New York.

Perhaps one day Tokyo.

Or Honolulu.

Or Oslo.

Dreams were wonderful.

Plane tickets were expensive.

But Sydney...

Sydney meant no flights.

No hotels.

No impossible travel costs.

She could actually be there.

The smile slowly faded.

She already knew what came next.

That evening she opened the small notebook she had guarded for almost seven years.

Every deposit.

Every extra dollar.

Every sacrifice.

Every skipped luxury.

At the bottom of the final page she had carefully written today's total.

\$35,103

Her finger rested on the number.

Then she turned to another page.

One line.

One number.

Still needed: \$15,000

She closed the notebook.

Not angrily.

Just quietly.

"So close..."

The next morning she visited her bank.

She had rehearsed the conversation all night.

She hated the idea.

She had never borrowed money before.

She wasn't even sure she believed in borrowing money.

But this...

This was different.

The meeting lasted less than twenty minutes.

The advisor folded his hands apologetically.

"I'm sorry, Miss Walker."

"The income simply doesn't support a loan of that size."

She nodded.

"I understand."

"You could save for another few years."

She smiled.

"I've already been saving for seven."

The advisor looked genuinely uncomfortable.

"I'm sorry."

"So am I."

Outside, Sydney continued exactly as before.

Cars hurried past.

People laughed outside cafés.

Someone played guitar near the harbour.

Cindy wandered through the streets without really seeing them.

Seven years.

Seven years.

And still fifteen thousand dollars short.

She sat down on a bench overlooking the water.

For a long time she watched the ferries crossing the harbour.

Eventually she opened the newsletter once more.

A beautiful photograph of the Foundation heel smiled back at her.

She laughed softly.

"I almost made it."

The words surprised even herself.

Almost.

Not quite.

She slipped the phone back into her handbag.

There would be no Foundation heel.

She had accepted that.

But another thought quietly appeared.

She frowned.

Looked back at the newsletter.

Foundation Party.

Guests.

Champagne.

Dinner.

Music.

...

"Catering."

She sat up.

"They'll need a catering company."

The idea grew with every passing second.

She wouldn't attend as a guest.

She couldn't.

But nobody said she couldn't attend as staff.

She could see the Foundation Collection.

She could experience the evening.

She could, just once, be part of the world she had admired for so many years.

A broad smile slowly returned to her face.

It wasn't the dream she had imagined.

But it was still a dream.

She pulled out her phone.

Foundation Party Sydney catering

Search.

Another search.

A press release.

An event announcement.

Fifteen minutes later she smiled.

"Got you."

"I know exactly where I'm applying on Monday."

For the first time since leaving the bank...

...hope returned.

Chapter 67 - Southbound

The skyline of Singapore had long since disappeared below the horizon.

Ahead of the MS Scarlett Heels lay almost two weeks of open ocean.

No ports.

No appointments ashore.

Nothing but endless blue water stretching toward Australia.

Life aboard quickly settled back into its familiar rhythm.

Morning workouts.

Video conferences with headquarters.

Long afternoons by the pool.

Evenings beneath a sky overflowing with stars.

Only one topic refused to disappear.

"The hug."

Breakfast had barely begun.

Bianca smiled dreamily over her coffee.

"...and then she hugged me."

Naomi buttered a slice of toast.

"Good morning."

Bianca looked at her.

"Good morning."

A pause.

Naomi took another sip of coffee.

"You lasted almost six minutes."

Scarlett burst into laughter.

"A new record."

Violet looked up from her tablet.

"I believe this is version 11."

Bianca pointed at her.

"Version 11 includes two details I forgot yesterday."

Naomi sighed with exaggerated patience.

"...Proceed."

Bianca happily accepted the invitation.

"The backstage corridor was much smaller than I remembered..."

Half an hour later the galley filled with music.

Eden.

Again.

Bianca hummed along while preparing lunch.

Naomi walked in carrying a tray of vegetables.

Without a word she connected her phone.

A moment later the unmistakable sound of Evergrey echoed through the room.

Bianca looked at her in mock disbelief.

"Really?"

Naomi calmly continued chopping vegetables.

"You had three songs."

"You counted?"

"I suffered."

Bianca laughed.

"You actually liked Eden."

Naomi looked up.

"I like Eden."

A tiny pause.

"I also like Evergrey."

Bianca smiled.

"That's progress."

Naomi nodded.

"It is."

Later that afternoon Scarlett wandered into the lounge.

The music system displayed two playlists.

The first already had a name.

Beauty

She selected the second.

Thought for a moment.

Then typed:

Noise

Naomi happened to walk past.

One eyebrow slowly rose.

Scarlett looked at her.

Smiled.

Deleted the word.

Typed another.

Beast

Naomi studied the display.

Then nodded once.

"...Accepted."

Bianca laughed so hard she nearly dropped her lemonade.

The days drifted by almost as peacefully as the ocean itself.

Work continued as always.

Headquarters barely noticed that its executive team was crossing half the globe.

Designs were approved.

Production schedules updated.

Boutiques prepared for autumn.

Whenever work ended, life simply continued.

Sometimes Naomi and Bianca disappeared into the galley.

Sometimes everyone spent the afternoon by the pool.

Sometimes they simply watched dolphins racing alongside the yacht.

Luxury had quietly become everyday life.

One evening they gathered on the observation deck to watch the sunset.

Australia still lay hundreds of nautical miles ahead.

Scarlett rested her elbows on the railing.

"So..."

"What are you looking forward to most?"

Bianca answered immediately.

"The Foundation Party."

Scarlett smiled.

"I thought so."

"And maybe shopping."

"That too."

Violet looked out across the glowing ocean.

"I enjoy seeing an event come together."

"You've already optimised half the schedule."

"I know."

Scarlett laughed softly.

"And probably the other half as well."

Violet didn't deny it.

Scarlett looked at Naomi.

"And you?"

Naomi thought for a moment.

"Australian steak."

Silence.

Then all three burst into laughter.

Naomi looked mildly offended.

"What?"

Bianca nudged her gently.

"Seriously?"

Naomi smiled.

"...Medium rare."

Even Scarlett had to wipe a tear from laughing.
Finally the laughter faded.
Bianca looked thoughtfully toward the horizon.
"Do you think Sydney will be even better than Monaco?"
Scarlett considered the question.
Then slowly shook her head.
"That's the wrong question."
Bianca tilted her head.
"It is?"
Scarlett smiled.
"The Foundation Party shouldn't repeat itself."
She watched the evening sun disappear into the ocean.
"Every year deserves its own memory."
Nobody spoke for a while.
Finally Violet smiled.
"So..."
"...what will Sydney's memory be?"
Scarlett looked toward the endless horizon.
"I don't know."
"But I'm looking forward to finding out."
The four women remained at the railing.
Far ahead...
Australia waited.
For a long moment only the sea spoke.
Then Bianca smiled quietly to herself.
"...She actually hugged me."

Naomi couldn't help smiling.

"...Yes."

A tiny pause.

"We know."

Bianca's dreamy smile only grew wider.

"I know..."

"...I just still can't believe it."

Above them the stars slowly appeared, one after another.

Ahead lay Sydney.

And a Foundation Party that would create a memory none of them could possibly foresee.

Chapter 68 - New Uniform

Monday morning arrived much too early.

Cindy was already standing outside the catering company's headquarters ten minutes before the doors opened.

She took a deep breath.

"This is it."

Inside, controlled chaos reigned.

Boxes were stacked everywhere.

Glasses clinked.

Someone hurried past carrying a tray of silver cutlery.

Another employee was checking endless lists of names.

The Foundation Party had become the only topic of conversation.

"You must be Cindy."

A cheerful woman extended her hand.

"I'm Melissa."

"Welcome to the madness."

Cindy smiled.

"I'm glad to be here."

"You'll get used to it."

Melissa looked around the bustling room.

"Eventually."

The morning passed in a whirlwind.

Table layouts.

Service procedures.

Emergency routines.

Wine etiquette.

The schedule for the evening.

Every detail had been planned down to the minute.

During a short break Melissa smiled at Cindy.

"You look unusually happy."

Cindy laughed.

"I probably do."

"Most new employees are nervous."

"I am."

"You don't look it."

Cindy looked around the busy room.

"I've dreamed of being part of a Foundation Party for years."

Melissa smiled.

"I thought you were just happy about the job."

"I am."

"But..."

She stopped herself.

Melissa leaned forward.

"But...?"

Cindy laughed softly.

"It's a long story."

"We've got coffee."

The lunch break arrived.

Most of the staff gathered around two long tables.

The conversation wandered from difficult customers to impossible event requests.

Eventually someone asked,

"So..."

"Who's actually buying Scarlett Heels?"

Several women shrugged.

"They're beautiful."

"And completely unaffordable."

"I'd never spend that much on shoes."

Cindy quietly smiled.

"I would."

The table became silent.

Melissa looked at her.

"You would?"

"I've been saving for seven years."

Nobody spoke.

One woman slowly lowered her sandwich.

"...Seven?"

Cindy nodded.

"I know."

Melissa blinked.

"For one pair?"

"No."

"For one dream."

Melissa hesitated.

"...How much is it?"

Cindy looked down at her coffee.

"Fifty thousand dollars."

Nobody said a word.

One waitress actually stopped chewing.

"...Fifty thousand?"

Cindy nodded.

"I've saved thirty-five thousand one hundred and three."

Melissa stared.

"You're telling me..."

"...you're still fifteen thousand dollars short?"

Cindy smiled with quiet resignation.

"Yes."

"I went to the bank on Saturday."

"They said no."

Someone shook her head in disbelief.

"They're just shoes."

Cindy smiled.

"They're not."

Silence settled over the table.

Nobody argued.

Nobody laughed.

They simply looked at her.

Just outside the open lunch room door, the supervisor happened to walk past carrying a mug of coffee.

"...Seven years?"

She slowed for just a moment.

Listened.

Rolled her eyes almost imperceptibly.

Then continued walking.

"Completely nuts..."

she muttered to herself.

The afternoon ended with the distribution of uniforms.

The supervisor stood beside several neatly stacked boxes.

"Everyone."

"White blouse."

"Black skirt."

"Black tights."

She held up a simple black pump.

"Five centimetre heels."

"The client requires elegant footwear."

One by one the employees collected their uniforms.

Cindy carefully folded hers into her bag.

As she turned away, Melissa glanced down at the shoes Cindy was wearing.

Dark ruby-red patent leather.

Elegant.

Perfectly maintained.

Melissa frowned.

"...You're not actually planning to work in those?"

Cindy looked down.

"My Scarlett Heels?"

"So you already have a pair of Scarlett Heels!"

Cindy looked down at them and smiled softly.

"...My only little luxury."

"They're eleven centimetres!"

"They are."

"You'll never survive an entire evening."

Cindy smiled.

She took a few relaxed steps across the room.

"They feel like sneakers."

Melissa stared.

"...You're serious."

"I've worn them almost every day for years."

Melissa looked once more at the impossibly elegant heels.

Then at Cindy.

Finally she laughed.

"I've decided."

"What?"

"You're completely crazy."

Cindy smiled.

"So I've been told."

The two women laughed together as they left the building.
Neither of them noticed the supervisor watching from the office window.
She shook her head.
Still smiling to herself.
"Seven years..."
By tomorrow morning...
...half the company would know the story.

Chapter 69 - Seen

The first Foundation Members arrived shortly before sunset.

The MS Scarlett Heels shimmered in Sydney Harbour, its upper decks glowing in ruby-red and gold.

Many of the women had attended before.

Susan and Jennifer met with a warm embrace.

Elsewhere, familiar faces greeted one another with laughter.

Some had returned for another Foundation Heel.

Others for Signature.

Grand.

Or Couture.

Every masterpiece would once again become a generous donation.

It felt less like an exclusive event...

and more like an annual reunion.

Cindy watched from behind a silver tray.

For seven years she had dreamed of seeing a Foundation Party.

Reality exceeded every expectation.

Not because of the luxury.

Because everyone genuinely seemed happy to see one another.

Across the lounge Bianca was already spreading smiles as effortlessly as

champagne.

Violet appeared wherever she was needed.

Naomi quietly watched over it all.

And in the middle of the room Scarlett welcomed every guest as though they were arriving at her own home.

"Cindy?"

Melissa appeared beside her.

"Champagne for the terrace."

Cindy smiled.

"On my way."

The evening unfolded smoothly.

Until, for one unfortunate minute...

everything happened at once.

One guest asked for champagne.

Another asked where the observation deck was.

A third needed assistance.

"Cindy?"

"Just one moment."

She smiled apologetically.

"I'll be right with you."

Scarlett noticed the situation immediately.

Without hesitation she stepped over.

"I've got this."

She lifted the tray from Cindy's hands.

"You help the others."

Before Cindy could protest, Scarlett was already serving champagne

herself.

Several Foundation Members laughed.

It was exactly the sort of thing Scarlett would do.

"Cindy!"

The sharp voice cut through the conversation.

The catering supervisor marched across the lounge.

"What do you think you're doing?"

Cindy stared.

"I..."

The supervisor pointed at Scarlett.

"The client is serving your guests."

Only then did she realize who the "client" actually was.

She turned back to Cindy.

"You're finished."

Melissa stepped forward.

"It wasn't her fault."

"It doesn't matter."

"It does."

Scarlett's voice remained calm.

"It was my decision."

The supervisor looked from Scarlett to Cindy, searching desperately for an explanation.

Finally she found one.

"The girl's completely obsessed."

Cindy closed her eyes.

Please...

The supervisor continued anyway.

"She's been saving for seven years."

"For one of your Foundation shoes."

"She's still fifteen thousand dollars short."

"She even took this job just to be here tonight."

Silence.

Scarlett looked at Cindy.

"Is that true?"

Cindy nodded.

"...Yes."

Scarlett studied her for a moment.

Then she asked quietly,

"Why?"

Cindy looked around the lounge.

At the women laughing together.

At friendships that had clearly lasted for years.

Then back at Scarlett.

"I didn't just want to see a Foundation Party."

A small smile.

"I wanted to be part of one."

For just a moment Scarlett said nothing.

Then someone called her name from across the lounge.

Another guest had arrived.

Scarlett smiled.

"The evening belongs to our guests."

"But would you wait for me after the party?"

Cindy looked at Scarlett.

"...Of course."

"Good."

Scarlett smiled warmly.

"I'd like to hear the rest of your story."

She returned to her guests.

Violet fell into step beside her.

"You noticed her."

Scarlett nodded.

"Yes."

"Why?"

Scarlett looked across the lounge.

Cindy had already picked up another tray.

She was smiling at a guest as though nothing had happened.

Then Scarlett said quietly:

"Because dreams usually fade."

A short pause.

"Hers didn't."

Chapter 70 - A Cup of Tea

The last guests left just before midnight.

Laughter slowly faded into the warm Sydney night.

Crew members began clearing the last glasses.

The Foundation Party had once again become another remarkable evening.

Scarlett stood for a moment at the railing, looking across the harbour.

Then she turned.

"Is Cindy still here?"

Melissa smiled.

"She waited."

"Good."

A few minutes later Cindy entered the small lounge adjoining Scarlett's office.

She hesitated at the door.

Scarlett looked up immediately.

"Cindy."

She smiled warmly.

"Thank you for waiting."

"I... wasn't sure whether you still meant it."

"I did."

Scarlett gestured towards a comfortable chair.

"Please."

Cindy sat down carefully.

Only then did she notice the others.

Violet looked up from her tablet.

Naomi offered a quiet nod.

Bianca beamed as though they had known each other for years.

Scarlett poured tea.

"No interviews."

She smiled.

"I'd simply like to hear your story."

Cindy told it quietly.

Saving for her first pair.

Four months.

The Tailor Lounge.

The Collection Ceremony.

Discovering Foundation.

The promise she had made to herself.

Then the years that followed.

Every month.

Every dollar.

Seven years.

The bank.

The rejection.

The catering job.

"So..."

she finished with a small smile,

"...I thought at least I could be part of a Foundation Party."

Silence.

Not an uncomfortable silence.

A thoughtful one.

Scarlett looked at her for a long moment.

"Seven years."

Cindy nodded.

"Yes."

Scarlett smiled.

"I admire determination."

Bianca had been studying Cindy ever since she entered the room.

Finally she couldn't contain herself any longer.

"Cindy..."

"...has anyone ever told you how beautiful you are?"

Cindy looked genuinely surprised.

"...No."

Bianca frowned.

"Well."

"They should have."

Cindy laughed nervously.

"I think you've mistaken me for someone else."

Bianca shook her head.

"Oh no."

She stood.

Walked around Cindy once.

Then stopped directly in front of her.

"You need blue streaks."

Cindy blinked.

"...Blue?"

"Definitely blue."

"And a beautiful evening gown."

She looked down at Cindy's Scarlett Heels.

"They can stay."

Then she turned to Scarlett.

"Can I?"

Scarlett laughed.

"You haven't even asked Cindy."

Bianca looked back immediately.

"Oh."

She smiled apologetically.

"Cindy..."

"...may I?"

For the first time that evening Cindy laughed without feeling nervous.

"I..."

"I suppose so."

Bianca clapped her hands together.

"Oh, this is going to be wonderful."

Violet put down her teacup.

"We're still looking for the Blue Grotto model."

The room became still.

Bianca stopped smiling.

Scarlett slowly turned towards Violet.

Violet looked mildly puzzled.

"What?"

"I just said we're still looking."

Scarlett looked back at Cindy.

For several seconds she said nothing.

Then—

"Cindy..."

"...have you ever modelled?"

Cindy stared.

"No."

"Would you like to?"

She actually laughed.

"Really?"

"I'm quite serious."

"But..."

"I'm not a model."

Bianca smiled.

"Not yet."

Scarlett folded her hands.

"There is one small problem."

Cindy's smile faded.

"The campaign has a budget."

She smiled apologetically.

"Since this would be your first campaign..."

"...I'm afraid we could only pay fifteen thousand dollars."

Silence.

Cindy looked at Scarlett.

Then at Violet.

Then back again.

She frowned.

Quietly.

Almost to herself.

"...Fifteen thousand..."

She stopped.

Her eyes widened.

Scarlett said nothing.

She simply waited.

Cindy looked down into her teacup.

Then back up again.

Tears began gathering in her eyes.

Violet nodded once.

Bianca smiled from ear to ear.

Naomi, who had remained silent throughout the evening, allowed herself the faintest smile.

Scarlett leaned forward.

Finally Cindy whispered,

"I'd be honoured."

Scarlett smiled.

"No."

She gently shook her head.

"We'd be honoured."

Silence settled over the room once more.

A warm, peaceful silence.

Bianca suddenly jumped to her feet again.

"Excellent!"

She pointed enthusiastically at Cindy's hair.

"We're starting with the blue streaks."

Everyone laughed.

Even Cindy.

For the first time in a very long time...

the future no longer felt impossibly far away.

BLUE GROTTO

A blue shining light

Created for women who never follow footprints. Only leave them.

Blue Grotto is a celebration of purity, craftsmanship, and fearless elegance.

Its luminous deep-blue silhouette rises on a breathtaking 140 mm stiletto, balanced by a concealed platform that transforms extraordinary height into effortless grace.

A hand-set crystal adorns the sculpted heel counter.

Six subtle scallops echo the perfect symmetry found only in nature.

Hidden beneath every step, an intricate wave pattern unfolds across the white sole before revealing Scarlett's own signature, embossed into the leather itself—a detail intended not for everyone, but for those who choose to look closer.



Photographed exclusively on the Blue Grotto, Capri.

No studio.
No artificial scenery.
Only light.
Only ice.
Only perfection.



SCARLETT HEELS

— BLUE GROTTO —

Crafted by Hand. Inspired by Winter.

Chapter 72 - The Next Celebration

The Blue Grotto campaign had been a success.

The Foundation Party had been a success.

For the first time in days...

there was nothing left to organise.

The four women remained on the upper deck long after midnight, watching the lights of Sydney shimmer across the harbour.

Bianca stretched contentedly.

"Well..."

She smiled.

"That was beautiful."

Scarlett nodded.

"It was."

Bianca looked around.

"So..."

"What are we celebrating next?"

Scarlett laughed.

"We've only just finished."

"I know."

Bianca grinned.

"But I'm already looking forward."

She thought for a moment.

Then her face lit up.

"I've got it!"

Everyone looked at her.

"A beautiful wedding!"

Everyone laughed.

Bianca laughed too.

Encouraged by her own idea, she continued.

"White dresses..."

She counted on her fingers.

"Beautiful bridesmaids..."

"A string quartet..."

She clapped her hands.

"Flowers everywhere."

"And imagine the photographs!"

Scarlett smiled.

"I think you've planned the entire day."

Bianca looked genuinely puzzled.

"Not yet."

"I haven't even chosen the cake."

The laughter grew even louder.

Bianca leaned back dreamily.

"...and everyone we love would be there."

Scarlett chuckled softly.

Then the conversation drifted elsewhere.

Later that night

Naomi stood quietly at the stern, watching the dark water slip past beneath the yacht.

She heard footsteps behind her.

Bianca.

"I thought I'd find you here."

Naomi smiled faintly.

"You usually do."

For a while they simply stood together, listening to the gentle sound of the sea.

Finally Bianca nudged her shoulder.

"You're thinking."

Naomi nodded.

"You started it."

"What?"

"The wedding."

Bianca laughed.

"Oh..."

"I was only joking."

"I know."

Naomi looked out across the harbour once more.

Then quietly said,

"I don't want to own your future."

Bianca turned towards her.

Naomi hesitated only briefly.

"I just..."

"...don't want to miss it."

Bianca's smile slowly softened.

"Yes."

"YES!"

"YES!! YES!! YES!! YES!!!!!"

She gave Naomi the biggest Power Hug of her life.

Scarlett sat alone in the quiet lounge.

The reports from the Foundation Party still lay open on the table.

Another successful year.

The door opened softly.

Violet entered carrying two cups of tea.

"I thought you might still be awake."

Scarlett smiled.

"You know me."

Violet placed one cup beside her.

For a while neither of them spoke.

They didn't need to.

Eventually Violet smiled.

"Bianca may have a point."

Scarlett laughed.

"About another celebration?"

Violet nodded.

She looked down at her tea for a moment.

Then said, almost matter-of-factly,

"We've spent years building a life together."

Scarlett looked up.

Violet met her eyes.

"Perhaps..."

"...it's time we acknowledged it."

Scarlett remained silent.

She simply reached across the table...

and took Violet's hand.

A warm smile spread across her face.

"I think..."

"...I'd like that very much."

Breakfast overlooked a sparkling Sydney Harbour.

For once there were no schedules.

No meetings.

No presentations.

Just coffee.

Fresh fruit.

Croissants.

Naomi looked around the table.

A small smile appeared on her face.

"We have something we'd like to tell you."

Scarlett looked at Violet.

Then smiled.

"So do we."

Bianca's eyes widened.

"Oh!"

She clapped her hands.

"You go first!"

"Or, no..."

"...we go first!"

She beamed.

"Naomi asked me to marry her!"

Silence.

Scarlett blinked.

Violet smiled.

Naomi looked slightly embarrassed.

Bianca looked as though she might burst with happiness.

Then Scarlett laughed.

"Well..."

She reached for Violet's hand.

"In that case..."

"Violet asked me too."

Now it was Bianca's turn to stare.

She looked at Scarlett.

Then at Violet.

Then at Naomi.

Then back again.

For perhaps three seconds...

the room was completely silent.

Suddenly Bianca threw both hands into the air.

"I planned this!"

The dining room erupted with laughter.

Scarlett shook her head, smiling.

She raised her coffee cup.

"To the next celebration."

Four cups met in the middle of the table.

Outside, the Ocean sparkled in the morning sun.

Inside...

...the next chapter of the Scarlett Heels story had just begun.







Scarlett Heels

A gifted nineteen-year-old shoemaker dreams of creating the world's finest luxury heels. With the help of an investor who believes in her before anyone else, Scarlett Corvina transforms a tiny workshop into an international luxury house where craftsmanship comes before profit and people matter more than titles. As brilliant engineer Violet, steadfast Naomi and irrepressible Bianca enter her life, the company grows into something none of them expected: a family. Spanning years of ambition, friendship, romance and unforgettable journeys, *Scarlett Heels* is a feel-good novel about building beautiful things—and discovering that the most important masterpiece is the life you create together.

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If you enjoyed reading *Scarlett Heels*, you can buy Scarlett a glass of champagne.

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