

## Animosity

### Chapter 1

He watched the rain on the night street from his second-floor window. It was only a mizzle, gathering on the broad leaves of the linden trees along the narrow street until the leaves sagged under its weight and shed the huge, spattering drops. It had been a cold winter in Paris, but spring came early and wet.

Ross Marteau turned and went to a workbench in his studio. He picked up the last slice of apple from the plate where he had cut it up with a paring knife and put it into his mouth as he looked around. The bronze sculpture of a nude woman, posed walking away and turning in a backward glance, was gone. But there were small clay maquettes of it everywhere. He had overseen the installation of the Turning Woman commission two weeks earlier. The client was thrilled. There was a party in the elegant conservatory of his home in St.-Germain-des-Prés where the sculpture was the center of attention. Champagne. Friends and sycophants cooed in admiration. The woman, the client's young wife, was flattered. Everything her husband was proud of, her taut flesh and firm musculature (his), her high-riding breasts (his), her entire, finely distributed anatomy (his), was there to stay. In thirty years if people forgot, or if they never knew her, they could look into the lush light of the conservatory and see what a fine thing she had once been.

So the studio was dormant. Job done. The dust had settled for good.

The tools and paraphernalia of clay modeling were scattered about, waiting to be organized and put away. He would do that, later. The place needed sweeping. It had been weeks since he'd bothered with it. This morning's coffee sat in a cold pot on a hot plate near the back of the studio, where there was an open shower, a toilet behind a muslin curtain, a rust-stained porcelain sink.

Chewing the slice of apple, he walked back to the window, leaned against the frame, and looked out again. And there she was, under her umbrella, gliding along beneath the dripping lindens, her raincoat glistening, her stride strong and quick. She turned without looking and crossed the wet street to the sidewalk below him, then disappeared into the foyer below.

He looked toward the door and waited. He heard her coming up the turning stairs, quick, impatient steps. No hesitation on the landing as she reached the last stair, and then the studio door flung open. There she stood, holding her dripping umbrella, her creamy face and a sheaf of auburn hair pulled to one side and falling over the front of one shoulder, making her seem as though she were the only thing in color, a pastel woman in a black-and-white world.

"Goddamn you," she said. "You son of a bitch."

She looked around the studio, her hazel-eyed glare slicing around the space until she found his things piled in a corner.

"God," she said, looking at his clothes hanging on a makeshift wooden rod underneath the long slanting skylight.

"You knew I was going to," he said. "You knew."

"We'd talked about it."

"That's right. Exactly."

"You didn't say when. You didn't say today." She was furious.

"I didn't really have to, did I?"

"We didn't agree it was final."

"Agree? Christ, Marian, we haven't agreed on anything for a year now, longer. As for final, it's been final for six months. We've just never had the guts to admit it to each other."

She was trembling.

She dropped the umbrella and fought off her raincoat, threw it over

one of the maquettes. She was poured into black tights, from ankles to waist. She wore a white blouse with a pleated front, its long tail gathered under her rib cage and tied in a knot. Her sandals were wet. Her hands were wet, and she wiped them on her blouse to dry them. Strands of auburn hair hovered in agitation around her face. She was breathing heavily, having quick-walked from their flat near Métro Raspail.

She put a long hand on one hip, wrist up, and looked around, searching for the next thing to say, and then snapped her eyes on him.

"This is . . . vicious," she said.

Vicious. She liked that word. Ironically.

"It's over." He paused. "It's over for me."

She glared at him. He imagined her hair, hot with her anger, heating like the coils on his hot plate in the corner. He imagined the auburn strands beginning to glow.

Abruptly she turned her back on him, hand on hip, the other cupping her forehead, a gesture of wild distress. He looked at her tight buttocks as she stood with one leg cocked at the knee. The woman had a beautiful body, that was all you could say about it. He was ashamed to admit that it was harder to leave a body like that than one that was less stunning. How long had he stayed with her just because of the body?

She spun around.

"What . . . are we going to do?"

"I'm through here," he said. "I'm going home."

She looked as if he'd slapped her. With these seemingly innocuous words he had locked her out of his house, and out of his life.

"No," she said.

"Marian, I can't do this anymore. This past year's been excruciating. There's nothing left . . . between us." Pause. "Not for me."

"You think I'm going to just let you walk away from three years together?"

"Nearly."

"What?"

"Nearly three years."

"Goddamn you! It's three years of my life, too."

"Look, we gave it our best shot-"

"Shot! That's what you call three years together, a 'shot'?"

"Okay, wrong choice of words. You're right. But I can't do this anymore. I'm weary of insults, weary of grievances, weary of accusations of wrongs, imagined or real."

"Weary of me."

He didn't say anything, an insulting silence.

"What's your record with a woman, Ross? This it? Three years? I think it is, isn't it? Was it always their fault, too, Ross? Did you lecture them, too . . . tell them how you couldn't take it anymore? Tell them how weary you were . . . of them? You arrogant son of a bitch!"

He was exhausted. They had just been through two days of this, a marathon siege of verbal hostilities that had bloodied their souls and murdered the last simulacrum of caring that might have remained between them. It had all been said in those forty-eight hours, words long held in check, words oft repeated, words that should never have passed their lips or even left the mean corners of their hearts.

"I can't be with you anymore," he said, "and I don't want to be."

She looked at him, stricken. The expression on her face was wrenching, and it shocked him. What constitutes a mortal wound to the heart? What does it look like, looking back at you? It really was the end for them. And now—at this moment—she knew it, too.

There was a partition of free-standing wooden shelves near the doorway where he kept a mélange of junk that he had gathered in the flea markets during the past year. He was an incurable collector of stuff, and wherever he traveled and stayed for any length of time he accumulated the priceless and the worthless together, its commercial value having no bearing on his desire to have it.

Marian leaped at the shelf and snatched a vase from it. It was a pottery vase with a crazed turquoise glaze that Marian herself had made in the first year of their relationship. He loved the piece and carried it with him whenever he had to relocate for any length of time. He put it on a shelf or a mantel or a ledge, and all the other things that he collected while he was there were gradually drawn to the vase as if it were the magnetic hub of their cumulation.

In one quick sweep of her body she wheeled around and flung the

vase with all her might against the largest of the Turning Woman maquettes. The vase exploded, blowing green shards into the air in a radiant burst of turquoise fireworks. He heard the pieces falling all around him like hail and saw them skittering across the rough wooden floor.

Marian was in a rage, hyperventilating. He saw what happened next before it happened, as if he were watching a play he had seen before. He knew the script, saw it in an instant, whole, complete, though he was incapable of doing anything about it.

Eyes swollen in wrath, Marian lunged at the table where he had been eating the apple and grabbed the paring knife. He remembered her posture in that instant as if he had sculpted her: long body stretched out, right arm reaching for the paring knife, one black-lighted leg extended behind, the other bent for support, buttocks compacted with tension, a flame of auburn hair falling across her right eye. It was a narrative posture of aggression.

He didn't remember how she gained her balance to throw the knife, but he remembered her hand outstretched toward him, almost as if reaching for him. But she wasn't reaching. She had released the knife. It tumbled sloppily through the air toward him because she didn't know what she was doing, didn't know how to do it properly, just slung it somehow in his direction. There are scientific odds to tumbling. When the knife reached him, what would those odds be that it would hit him handle first? Or blade first? Or flat? Or any one of the 360 degrees of angles in between?

He put up his hands and turned to the side.

The blade went into his right deltoid muscle as straight and smooth as a bullet. And buried to the hilt.

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