

## **IAC WIP SAMPLE-JESSICA RENSLOW**

### **SAMPLE CHAPTER**

#### **MALLORY, CHICAGO, IL (FEB PRESENT DAY)**

Billowy, gray clouds engulfed the City of the Big Shoulders, reminding Mallory of the way Gran would wrap herself in her shawl on evenings past. She missed her with a sudden rush of emotion, wished she was still around so she could call her and tell her about the baby. She knew what her grandmother would do. She would go and find something in her sunroom, and clip just the right token for when the baby was due. She would tell her everything about the plant and season that it was meant for and how that would bring a good omen for the child she was carrying.

Her grandmother had always been whimsical, pointing out enchantments and Mallory had never quite been sure how seriously she took them. It drove her own mother to frustration to hear Gran go on about spirits and whatnot, as she got into her later years her whimsy overtook her, which is how she ended at the old folks' home and the rift had come between Mal and her cousin. Batting back tears, she longed for a simpler time when Gran wasn't suffering from dementia and Stewie was still talking to her not ignoring her texts.

Throwing on her heavy winter gear she grabbed her computers and walked out into the fickle February evening. She was not looking forward to taking "The L" home. At least her office was a block from the commuter train. Trains wound around Chicagoland, looping where river crossings once were. It was funny the way transit layered over each other like sedentary rock. Trains made her think of the summers she had spent with Gran. They had been part of her childhood. A train whistle in the distance still relaxed her in the way only the touchstones from childhood can. She fantasized about hopping on the Southshore and napping in Gran's guest

room that afternoon. It was one of the most calming places she had ever known. Draped in eyelet curtains and hand-quilted bedcovers, it was hard not to fall under its soporific spell.

She could do it, hop on the next eastbound to Indiana. Really it was only an hour or so ride on the train. So, why did it feel like she was worlds apart from each other. Toying with the fantasy of escaping everything for a few minutes, she slinked away to summers past, but there were different home fires waiting for her these days.

Feeling the certainty that helped her close deals in the boardroom, she knew her husband was cooking something hearty to fight off the Chicago winter. Aromas were probably already escaping her kitchen and out the door down the hall causing the rest of the apartment complex to be jealous of her good fortune. She would tell him her secret after they ate, and their little girl was in bed. She would whisper it to him. She knew it would give him joy and she wanted to make him happy.

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The table had been cleared and just as she was going to grab them refills, she leaned in and whispered into her husband's ear. A broad smile burst across Ethan's face. It was a good face, a handsome one with honest eyes. Her husband with his rugged looks could still slay it in the dating scene. He was all hers and loyal as they came, which was much sexier than his strong arms and symmetrical features. She could fall in love with him on any given night watching him whip up an awesome meal or tuck their daughter in bed. She fell in love with his gray eyes and keen smile on their first date, but it was his natural nurturing skills that kept her close.

They worked as a couple because they let each other truly be who that were. She was fine bringing home the bacon because he was cool with frying it in the pan, and he did it better than

she ever could have. She did not know where to put the grease from the pan let alone how to keep it sparkling. Now he looked boyishly happy. Telling him this time was so different from her first pregnancy.

“Do you know how far along you are?” He asked after they broke away from a kiss.

“I think about six weeks.” She shrugged. “Happy New Year’s.” He laughed and she smirked. This was good, she knew it was.

“Sooo, a late summer baby?” He took her hand in his and kissed the top of it. The warmth of his lips and then the feel of the flesh of his chin as he moved her hand up his cheek were calming.

“Yes, I’d think the last days of August, or maybe Labor Day at the latest?” She yawned, she was sundowning earlier and earlier these days. “Sorry, this first trimester is kicking my ass this time.” She was sure, as she sometimes was about certain things that usually came true, that she was carrying a little boy.

“You up for this?” He looked at her deep in the eyes, searing close to her soul. The way he could look into her like that always made her squirm sometimes in a good way, sometimes in a way that made her unfordable with facing her demons.

“Of course.” She stretched out a smile, hoping she seemed convincing. “It’ part of the plan.”

“You going to negotiate some maternity leave?” He continued to poke at her armor. “It’s ridiculous that they don’t have a baked in policy.”

“I know.” She shook her head in dismay. “I’ll talk them into me working from home at the very least. I got that short term disability policy. It will cover the first two months, but I’ll need to work right up to the deadline.”

“Only you would refer to giving birth as the deadline.” He let out a rueful chuckle.

“Oh, you know what I mean.” She rolled her eyes and crossed her arms.

“Yes, I do.” He shook his head at her.

“You know I was thinking, if I can talk them into a work from home policy-“

“How on earth does a tech company not have one after the pandemic?” He asked.

“Don’t get me started.” She pursed her lips. This had been a bone of contention with her and her boss for a few months. He kept saying he would draft something up, but of course that never happened. She had a feeling that if she did not write a rough draft up and let him think it was his idea, it was never going to happen. “But if I talk-“

“When you talk them into it.” Ethan corrected.

“Yes, when I talk them into it.” She smiled. “What would you think about spending some time down at my Gran’s place?”

“Welllll...” He looked around their small apartment. “Goodness knows we don’t have enough room for four people here.”

“Yeah, that’s for sure.” She agreed. “It’s not like it will cost us any extra and I really have been meaning to go down there and check in on the place. It’s been too long since someone has been in there.”

“Really you should have someone checking in on the pipes and stuff.” He pointed out.

“I had it all winterized when you suggested it last spring.” She smiled her business smile. He could be so condescending when it came to practical logistics. “Annnd you know Stewie just can’t help himself. I’m sure he has probably checked in on the old place.”

“So, he still has keys?” Ethan looked at her with a pair of surprised eyes.

“Of course. It’s his childhood home after all.” Mallory explained. “I would never make him give those up.” Her husband raised his hands in surrender.

“Not my family not my business.” He said assuring her he would remain Switzerland.

“Well, no he is part of your family now too, but I just want to make it clear that I could never ask my cousin to totally give up his childhood home. Even if the lawyers have.” It sounded awful and she still had not come to terms with the strange arrangement herself.

“I get it, and we may technically be family, but I’ll let you handle your side. Mine keeps me busy enough as it is.” A strained laugh croaked from his throat. “Well. I’d love to go. I’ve heard so much about it, it feels like it’s time to see the old place in person.”

This thought warmed her from the inside out, bringing her husband, and her daughter to her second childhood home had been something she had always wanted. A tingling feeling tugged at the back of her mind. No this was a scene she had seen somewhere before, a movie maybe. It felt like a memory, but there was no way that was possible.