

THE
FASHION
DESIGNER

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NANCY MOSER

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Our mission is to inspire the world with the life-changing message of the Bible.



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DEDICATION

To my family
who taught me that
dreams can come true
with faith, hope, and hard work

**

"Be strong and do the work."

1 CHRONICLES 28:10 NIV

CHAPTER ONE

*Late August 1912
New York City*

Annie Culver tidied her work table for the last time. She set her ruler and French curve to the side and placed her scissors, tablet, and pencil in a drawer. These tools of her trade had become extensions of herself, a way to transfer a fashion idea into a dress pattern that could be used by home sewers across the world. Idea to pattern to finished product.

I've come so far. Am I a fool for leaving it all behind?

“Get a move on, Annie.” Her friend and coworker Maude Nascato stood at the door of the workroom. “Risk not, want not.”

Maude’s strange phrase snapped Annie out of her reverie. “What does that mean?”

Maude pinned a straw hat onto her black upswept hair. “Whatever it needs to mean to warm your cold feet.” She paused and gave the room one last look. “Our quitting is a good thing, Annie. As Mark Twain said, ‘I was seldom able to see an opportunity until it had ceased to be one.’ We’ve seen the opportunity. We’re walking through this door and into a new adventure.”

“But is the opportunity a wise choice?”

Maude released an exasperated sigh, strode to the table, took Annie by the arm, and marched her out of the workroom. “Courageous people don’t look back.”

“I don’t feel courageous. I feel nauseous.”

Maude laughed. “I’m afraid it goes with the territory.”

They met Annie’s husband, Sean, on the sidewalk outside. He too worked

for Butterick Pattern Company but was staying in his position. Someone had to pay the rent.

He studied her face. "It will be all right, Annie-girl."

"You promise?"

Maude started walking, leading the way to a celebration commemorating their momentous decision. "I am compelled to quote another author. John Galsworthy has pinned Annie to a tree with this quote." She took a fresh breath before saying, "A worrier is 'one who is always building dungeons in the air.'" She put a period on the phrase with a sharp nod.

Annie took offense. "Do you have any more quotations to toss at me?"

"Not at the moment."

"What a relief. But to your complaints about my worrying, how can I not worry, Maude? How can you two be so calm? This is an enormous step we're taking. We have no idea if our new business will succeed. And if it doesn't, I'm not the only one out of a job, but you and Edna too. She's worked at Macy's for decades and is quitting because of some harebrained idea I came up with. What if we fail?"

Maude stopped walking and faced her. "What if that building there suddenly falls to the ground in front of us? What if that motor car jumps the curb and runs us down? What if—?"

Sean stopped her tirade. "Your examples are overly dramatic."

She shrugged. " 'Twas all I could come up with on short notice." She slipped her hand around Annie's arm. "There are worries big and small all around us. Some we can deal with directly, and some we can't."

"I know you," Sean said, taking Annie's other arm. "You've never let circumstances stop you. You won't let anything get in your way."

Annie tried to embrace their confidence, yet the worry remained.



"Welcome, fellow rebels!" Edna Holmquist greeted her friends as they entered the flat she shared with Maude.

"I prefer the term 'brave soldiers,'" Maude said.

Annie spotted Sean's parents—her in-laws of nearly four months—and hoped the terminology wouldn't make things worse, for his father had vociferously argued against their plan. Annie kissed her mother-in-law, Vesta, on the cheek. "It's not as sensational as they imply." She turned to Edna. "How was your last day at Macy's?"

“Poignant.” She sighed dramatically.

“How many sewing machines have you sold over twenty-two years?” Maude asked.

“One thousand two hundred twelve.”

Annie laughed. “You kept track?”

“My sales book kept track.”

“Pfft.” Richard Culver returned to the sofa. “It’s ridiculous to discard perfectly good jobs to pursue an idiotic folly.”

“Hello to you too, Father,” Sean said. He kissed his mother’s cheek, and they shared a look of commiseration.

“I believe in you,” Vesta said. “I am thrilled with the notion that you three ladies will be starting your own fashion company.”

“The *notion*,” Richard said. “Not reality.”

Edna offered him a sandwich from a tray. “It is a reality, Mr. Culver,” she said. “We have financial backing, creative energy, and a fire in our bellies.”

“It’s a fool’s errand, doomed to failure.” He looked askance at the ham-and-cheese sandwich, took one, then set it on his plate on the end table beside him.

Annie was not going to let him squelch their joy, yet she wasn’t comfortable enough with the family dynamics to stand up to him. From what she’d learned from Sean and Vesta, their lifetime quest was to keep Richard on an even keel. It was the best anyone could ask for, as the man never seemed happy. Except perhaps when he was making money in his general store in Brooklyn. Though even then, profits were never high enough, employees lazy, and the preferences of customers, woefully fickle.

Annie had a choice to make. She could let Richard’s negativity squelch their celebration—and feed into her own worries—or choose to be enthusiastic and encouraging.

She owed it to her friends to choose the latter.

Famished, she took a large bite of her sandwich. “Edna, these hit the spot.” When she was finished with the bite, she said, “I know the risk we are all taking and thank you for it. Beyond the unknowns, I am chuffed to bits about our new venture.” She took up a glass of lemonade and held it high. “To New York City’s newest, most brilliant, and most smashing fashion house!”

“Hear, hear!”

Everyone toasted except for Richard, but Annie refused to let him drown the moment. She was done with him.

“When is our meeting at the Sampsons’ tomorrow?” Edna asked, as she sat and ate her own sandwich.

“Ten o’clock,” Maude said. “Have we decided on a name for our company yet?”

“I vote for Annie’s Dresses,” Edna said.

“I second that name,” Vesta said. “You should get the credit, Annie, for if it wasn’t for—”

Richard pointed to the seat beside him. “Shush, woman. You are not a part of this. Sit.”

Annie despaired the look of hurt resignation on Vesta’s face. But she knew a way to brighten it. She took Sean’s hand and gave him a look. “Yes?” she whispered.

He drew her hand to his lips. “We have something else to celebrate besides the start of a new business—the real reason we asked you here tonight.” He looked to Annie.

“We are also starting a new family.” She scanned the faces of their audience.

Vesta jumped from her seat. “A baby?”

Annie nodded and felt tears fill her eyes. “It’s due in February.”

She was embraced by all—as was Sean.

Richard remained noticeably seated. Finally, all eyes turned to him.

“Father? Will you congratulate us?”

“We will be grandparents, Richard. Isn’t it grand?”

He took a sip of lemonade then set the glass down. “You two certainly move quickly.”

Annie felt a wave of disappointment. Couldn’t he be happy for them?

Sean put an arm around her waist. “After nearly being on the *Titanic*, we realize life is short.”

Maude nodded. “The three of us had an amazing time in Paris getting ideas for Butterick at the fashion shows, but all would have been for naught if we hadn’t missed our train to Cherbourg.”

Annie finished the scenario. “Which caused us to miss the sailing.”

“God saved you,” Edna said.

Vesta’s eyes turned misty. “Saved you, and saved your future together. I’m

so pleased with your happy news.”

Sean kissed Annie’s cheek. “Our close call is why we married soon after we got home from Europe.”

“We did not expect a child so quickly,” Annie admitted. “But we are not in control of such things. God is.”

“Tell Him to slow down,” Richard muttered.

“Richard!” Vesta said.

Annie heard Sean’s breath hasten. How dare his father mar this special moment? “We will not ask God to slow down,” she said. “The Almighty is never late and never early, and we are very willing to accept His perfect timing.”

“Indeed we are,” Maude said. “A marriage and a new life came out of our close call, and so did the business.”

Edna lifted her glass. “To God’s perfect timing!”

Hear, hear.

CHAPTER TWO

They live *here*?” Maude asked as they stood in front of 451 Madison Avenue.

“In that wing,” Annie said, pointing to the four-story brick-and-stone wing to the right of an outdoor atrium.

“There are four other smaller townhouses in the rest of the building,” Sean added, pointing around the horseshoe-shaped structure. “But wait until you see the inside of the Sampsons’. Theirs is enormous, and everything is covered in gilt, marble, marquetry, and—”

“Marquetry?” Edna asked.

“Tiny pieces of wood inlaid together to make a design,” Annie said. “Macy’s had some boxes with marquetry for sale. I saw an inlaid table too.”

Edna stared at the building. The flowers in her wide-brimmed hat shuddered in the breeze. “Boxes are one thing, I just never thought it would be used in a house. Mansion. Manor. Whatever it is.”

They walked through an ornate wrought-iron gate, and Maude led the way to a double-entry door. “No stopping now. We need to go into whatever-it-is in order to fulfill our fashion destiny.”

“Whatever *it* is,” Annie said under her breath. For though she tried to exhibit an air of confidence about their future, she knew Mrs. Sampson better than anyone, and knew her to be zealous to the point of folly and fickle to the point of frustration—everyone else’s but usually not her own. Her thought process was unique and often unfathomable.

It’s unfathomable that she believes I can be a viable fashion designer.

“Annie? Are you coming?” Sean asked.

She was so glad it was Saturday and he could come with them. Annie shifted her portfolio of fashion designs under the other arm and pretended she was brave. She rang the bell.

They were shown inside by a butler. He motioned them to the right,

down a wide hallway leading to the drawing room. “The Sampsons will be with you shortly.”

Annie was glad for the delay as it would give her friends time to absorb the opulence around them.

Maude gazed at the hall floor. “Look at this tile. There must be thousands of pieces put together to create the design.” With a hand to hold her hat, she looked up. “And look at the ceiling. Are those tiles too?”

They all looked up at the barrel vaults that interconnected above them. They were replete with intricate patterns like the floor.

“All that detail for a hallway,” Maude whispered.

“The drawing room is even fancier. Follow me.”

Annie’s sense of purpose intensified when she reminded herself she’d been in the drawing room before, during her first meeting with the Sampsons the previous autumn. She and Sean had also experienced the vast dining room that evening. Those facts spurred her confidence—to a small degree.

Once through the drawing room doors, the newcomers gasped—with good reason. The room was enormous, with marble walls and columns. The ceiling was coffered and covered in gilt. Painted murals divided windows on three sides. The fourth side sported two fireplaces flanking the entrance where they stood.

Annie pointed to the elaborate floor. “See, Edna? Marquetry.”

“I hate to step on it.”

“Who knows how to create such things?” Maude asked.

“Who has the money to pay for the labor of it?” Sean said.

“The Sampsons do, and—” Annie heard footsteps echo in the long hall. “Shh.”

They all faced the door, ready to greet their host and hostess.

Mrs. Sampson swept in, the ruffles on her dress waving like lavender flags of chiffon. She immediately did a twirl. “You like?”

Actually. . . “Is it new?”

“Brand. I had my dressmaker whip it up for our time in Newport this summer.” She executed another twirl. “It portrays the essence of graceful motion, don’t you think?”

The essence of flaunting too many flourishes. “It does move well,” Annie said diplomatically.

“The color is beautiful,” Edna managed.

“The chiffon is feminine,” Maude added.

Mrs. Sampson stopped her preening. “*Is* beautiful and *does* move, as if you are finding it difficult to find something nice to say about it?”

Oh dear.

“I meant no offense,” Maude said. “I meant to say that fabric that is sheer and flowy—in general and in respect to your specific dress—is—”

Luckily Mr. Sampson intervened. “Why don’t we sit and work out the details of our joint venture?”

“I’ve been stewing about it all summer,” Mrs. Sampson added.

Mr. Sampson winked at her. “And if you know Eleanor, you know she can only stew so long before she spills the pot.”

As they were shown to some chairs, Annie and Maude exchanged a look of relief at getting through their awkward faux pas. It would not bode well to be on tenterhooks before the main discussion began—a life-changing discussion.

Sean helped Mr. Sampson draw some other chairs closer together, creating an intimate circle in the huge space, a circle suitable for conversation.

Mrs. Sampson arranged the myriad of ruffles on her lap and over the arms of the chair. Only when she was finished did she speak. “Well then.”

Her words were met with silence. Finally Annie said, “Where do we begin?”

“With a soiree, of course.”

“A what?” Sean asked.

Mr. Sampson interpreted. “A party. Eleanor loves parties.”

“I do. I happen to be quite good at giving them.”

“And attending them,” he said.

“That too.” She drew in a deep breath as though fueling her next words. “The plan is for you to sew up a dozen dresses and have a fashion soiree right here, with the who’s who of New York City in attendance. In fact, I will ask their daughters to be the models. The whole of society will be so awed by your designs that they will order them in copious amounts and—”

Annie lifted a hand, stopping her words. “I thought our customers were working women.”

“Everyday women,” Maude said.

Edna nodded and pointed to Annie’s portfolio. “Annie’s already drawn up some designs that we think—”

Annie began to reach for it, but Mrs. Sampson stopped her with a hand.

“Not yet.” Her face had grown stern. “I believe we need to remedy this misconception between us.”

It was more than a mere misconception. It was the essence of their business.

Sean sat forward in his chair. “Remember when we spoke about the business on the voyage home from the Paris fashion shows?”

Mr. Sampson let out a breath. “After we all narrowly missed the *Titanic*.”

Annie shivered at the memory. “I will never forget when our captain told us the news of its sinking—while we were still out on the ocean.”

Maude scoffed. “I still hold it against him that he said everyone was saved, when clearly they were not.”

“Now, now, Miss Nascato,” Mr. Sampson said. “False information is rampant in times of great tragedy.”

Maude sighed. “I still miss Madame.”

Annie nodded. Although the rest of them on the Paris junket had been delayed—and therefore saved—their superior, Madame Le Fleur, had found a way to make the train. And the boarding. She had perished in the icy waters of the North Atlantic.

Mr. Sampson’s wife put a hand on his arm. “We were saved for this. I know it.”

Annie was glad to get back to the subject at hand. “I agree with you. But as Sean pointed out, our initial idea was to provide functional, comfortable, and stylish clothing for the masses.”

“Not the elite,” Maude added.

Mrs. Sampson played with the draping on her sleeve. “Yes, I suppose that was the original intent, but I’ve had second thoughts, more grandiose thoughts.”

Annie’s stomach grabbed. “But that’s why you two invited me here for that first meeting when I was working at Butterick. You were against the ridiculous fashion of the hobble skirt and other designs that constricted women’s movement and ignored their needs. You were a proponent of function over fad.”

“That is true,” Mr. Sampson said—mostly to his wife. “That *was* our initial focus, Eleanor. Perhaps you’ve strayed a bit off the mark.”

She sprang to her feet. “Off the mark? I have found the mark, and it is a bull’s-eye! If Eleanor’s Couture is going to be a success—”

“Eleanor’s Couture?” Annie’s throat was dry.

“Well yes. I *am* at the epicenter of this business.” She stared at Annie. “Am I not?”

Maude answered for them. “If you will excuse me, I thought Annie was the epicenter. If not for her, none of us would be here.”

“If not for our money, none of you could afford to be here.”

Her words skittered across the marquetry and landed in the space between them.

“My sweet. . .you are too blunt.”

Mrs. Sampson turned to her husband. “I speak the truth, Harold. Are we not the ones at risk here? Who knows how much this endeavor will cost us?”

Mr. Sampson offered a sheepish smile. “Forgive my wife’s frank nature. But you must admit the extent of the financial risk is unknown.”

“That it is,” Sean said. “And we appreciate your backing and support.”

Annie had to speak her mind. “With all respect, we are also risking much. Edna, Maude, and I have quit our jobs to fully and wholeheartedly pursue this venture.”

The Sampsons blinked, as if they hadn’t thought of this point.

Mr. Sampson broke the silence. “All the more reason for our support.”

Annie felt her heart race. Her legs twitched, longing to stride out of the room, out of the whatever-it-was, and return home. Perhaps it wasn’t too late to get their jobs back.

Sean must have sensed the direction of her thoughts, for he touched a calming hand to her knee. “The main issue seems to be the identification of our customers.”

“Ordinary women,” Maude said.

“Wealthy women,” Mrs. Sampson said. “Focusing on them will be the surest way to gain a profit.”

“That could be true,” Sean said. “And we all want the business to be successful. As Annie stated, the ladies have given up their livelihood betting on it. But there is more than profit involved. There is purpose.”

“A purpose we all share,” Annie said. She wished her heart would stop pounding because she knew her voice would too strongly reflect her emotions. This was business. She needed to approach it like a businesswoman. *Please, God, help me say the right thing.* She managed a smile. “Perhaps we can compromise.”

“That is always a wise suggestion,” Mr. Sampson said. “Continue.”

“Perhaps we can create the twelve dresses and have your party.”

“Soiree.”

Annie let it go. “It *would* be a good way to gain the opinions of fashionable women. And the orders that are generated can keep the company afloat at the beginning and give us time to create a full line for a less-gentrified customer.”

Mrs. Sampson readjusted her flounces. “It’s possible. You’ve brought sketches?”



The four friends entered Sean and Annie’s flat with a communal sigh as though they’d been waiting to be in a familiar place before taking a full breath.

“I’m exhausted,” Edna said.

Maude threw her plumed hat on the table, where it was saved from the floor by Sean’s coffee cup. “Sorry,” she said, moving it. “And I agree. Maybe that’s why none of us have talked since we left the Sampsons’.”

Annie removed her hatpins, stuck them in the brim of her hat, and hung it on the coat rack. “My mind is a muddle.”

“A middling, mauling muddle.” Maude took a seat at the table.

Before sitting across from Maude, Sean hung his derby next to Annie’s hat and removed his suit jacket against the heat. Edna sat on the window seat and set her hat beside her.

Their hats off signaled they were in for the long haul.

“Muddled minds or no, it’s time to talk this through,” Edna said.

“Eleanor’s Couture,” Maude said.

They groaned.

“It’s so hoity-toity,” Edna said.

“As I told her, not what we had in mind at all,” Annie said.

“We should have had a name ready,” Sean said.

“It certainly would *not* have had ‘couture’ in it,” Maude said.

“Better late than never; perhaps we need to offer Eleanor an alternative.” Annie strolled to the window. The street below teemed with everyday women going about the business of living. She sat beside Edna. “Let’s share some words to describe our customer and what they want out of clothing in general.”

A stream of words were tossed into the air between them: *comfort, ease, style, affordability.*

“How about calling it Budget Fashion?” Edna asked.

Annie shook her head vehemently. “We want to offer clothes they can afford on a budget, but we want the name to sound more lofty. Inspiring.”

“Shoestring Fashion,” Maude offered. “Clothes for You. Cheap Clothes.”

Annie was glad she winked.

Sean pointed to a Sears catalog nearby. “People can buy reasonably priced clothes from Sears.”

“Or Macy’s,” Edna said. “What makes our clothes different?”

Annie pressed her fingers to her forehead—which was beginning to throb. “If my thoughts were a muddle before, they are now a seething storm.”

Edna put a hand on her knee. “Let’s set the name aside for now. We have work to do. Twelve dresses to sew for Mrs. Sampson’s soiree.” She pointed to Annie’s portfolio near the door. “Get out the sketches and let’s talk about the changes she wanted.”

The sketches were set on the table and the four of them gathered close. Annie sighed deeply. “She ruined them.”

They all nodded.

Annie continued. “She took the simplicity of my designs and spoiled them with fancy froufrou.” Each design now sported extra flounces, flowers, and frills. “Either you can’t see the design for the ornament, or she’s designed another ridiculous ruffle rumpus like the dress she was wearing.”

“Who does she think she is?” Maude said.

“She’s the money,” Sean said.

“Who are we?” Edna asked.

Annie had thought about this. “You are the sewing expertise, Maude has the patternmaking skill, Sean is the salesman, and I—”

“You are the creative talent.”

“We all are. Together we make a whole.”

“Mrs. Sampson is more than the money. She’s a charlatan,” Maude said.

“Too harsh, Maude,” Annie said.

“Harsh is as harsh does. She’s a hypocrite, luring us into a business with talk of function, comfort, and innovation that will free women’s movement, when what she really wants is a vehicle to keep fashion as fussy as it’s always been.”

Edna opened another subject. “And I do not want to have our sewing workshop in that library of theirs. Yes, the space is plentiful, but the walls are

paneled and dark, and the room smelled of dusty books.”

“And ancient history,” Maude added.

Annie looked around their small flat. “We agreed that we would sew in our flats at first. We could use Edna’s larger dining table to cut the fabric.”

“But didn’t we also decide we will need to hire seamstresses to help? I don’t want workers in my house,” Edna said. “I suppose I’ll do so if I need to, but if this business takes off as we hope, we need a place of business where we can all work together in one space.”

Sean clapped his hands once. “I’ve got it.”

“What?”

“An apartment upstairs is empty. The Delgados moved out last week.”

Annie jumped ahead. “It’s larger than this one. It has two bedrooms. We could rent it.”

“With what money?” Edna asked.

“I’ll get Mr. Sampson to pay for it,” Sean said. “As a businessman he will understand the need for a proper work space—away from his home.”

Annie remembered their tour of the Sampsons’ library. Although Eleanor had been passionate about using the space, Mr. Sampson had seemed hesitant. He’d said little, and his face had pulled in resignation more than approval. “Talk to him, Sean. And will you talk to the landlord too?”

“Consider it done. In fact, I’ll go speak with Mr. Collins right now. I saw him outside.”

He left them staring at the designs. “So are we going to sew these dresses like Mrs. Sampson wants?” Edna asked.

The decision was enormous. Yet Annie couldn’t see any way out. In one meeting their plans had been fully appropriated, pinched, nicked, and stolen. “We have no choice. If not for Eleanor none of us would be here, discussing—”

“Exactly. If not for her we’d still be working at our fairly well-paying jobs.” Maude shook her head. “The Sampsons led us round the flagpole but forgot which flag to raise.”

Annie had no defense and felt the pull of guilt. If not for *her*. . .

Edna touched her arm. “Let’s do what Eleanor asked. Who knows? Maybe we’ll get orders for a thousand dresses.”

“A thousand?” Maude said. “We can’t handle that many!”

Annie laughed. “We are never satisfied, are we, ladies?”

“But what if—?”

She raised a hand, stopping Maude’s words. “Let’s deal with the problems at hand. We need a workshop—which Sean is trying to procure. Meanwhile, we have the designs and a venue in which to show them. So let’s sew.”



Maude looked at her list of fabrics and supplies. “I know we can get everything we need retail, but we need to open a wholesale account.”

“With whom?” Annie asked.

“I’ve got some connections,” Maude said, her eyes on the list. “I’ll see what I can do.”

“Until then, I’m sure I could get a discount at Macy’s,” Edna said. “For supplies, and for two more sewing machines—or more.”

“They’ll do that? Even though you quit?”

“Velma will do me the favor—us the favor. I know she will.”

Velma MacDonald had been Annie’s boss in the Macy’s sewing department. She’d remained a good friend, even after Annie left to work for Butterick.

Sean came back to the apartment, his face glowing. “I got it!”

“The flat?” Annie asked.

“For how much?” Maude asked.

He hooked his thumbs in his vest. “For the same price as this apartment.”

“How did you manage that?” Annie asked. “It’s much bigger.”

“I promised Mr. Collins you’d make his wife and his daughters a dress. Gratis.”

“How many daughters?”

“Three.”

Four dresses to make. . . Annie had an awful thought. “This isn’t four dresses a month, is it?”

“No, no,” Sean said. “Four dresses total.”

“That’s not overwhelming,” Edna said.

Annie kissed Sean’s cheek. “Thank you. You have helped tick one box.”

“Out of many to be ticked,” Maude said.

“One at a time.” He pointed to Maude’s list. “What’s next?”

Annie took a fresh breath. “This is such a fifteen-puzzle.”

Everyone looked at her. “What are you talking about?”

“Americans don’t say that?”

“Obviously not,” Maude said.

Annie thought a moment, trying to find a way to explain it. “Fifteen-puzzle is a game with cubes that have numbers on them. They have to be arranged in a square so that each line adds up to fifteen.”

“Sounds challenging,” Edna said. “But what does a game have to do with our situation?”

“It’s so difficult and confusing to solve that if something is called a fifteen-puzzle it means it’s difficult.”

“Why didn’t you say so?” Maude said. “Okay, partners. Let’s get this fifteen-puzzle in order.”

CHAPTER THREE

“Here we are,” Edna said as she set the third sewing machine in place. “It took more than a week, but we are officially ready to sew.”

Annie scanned their new workshop. The two bedrooms of the flat were set up with the machines—Edna’s brought over from across the street and two others she purchased at a discounted price from Macy’s. The main room contained a large table to use for cutting.

Edna finished arranging the last two spools of thread on a pegged rack on a wall. “We are as ready as we can be.”

“As soon as the fabric arrives,” Annie pointed out. She glanced out the window. “Maude has been gone an extraordinary length of time.”

They all turned toward the door when they heard heavy footfalls on the steep stair leading to the third floor.

“Help!” came a cry.

Annie was the first to burst into the hall. Maude stood on the stairs, juggling two long rolls of fabric. One slid out of her grasp and tumbled down the stairs to the floor below. “I almost made it,” she said.

Annie gathered the roll from her arms, and Edna recovered the fallen bolt.

A winded Maude entered the workshop. “There’s more coming. I paid the driver to help with the rest.”

The fabrics were taken into the main room and placed on the large cutting table. All were tied with string. Annie cut one roll free, letting yards and yards of sea-green batiste flow free. “Maude, this is lovely.”

“I told you I’d choose well—following your extensive directions of course.”

“How many more rolls are there?” Edna asked.

“Ten. Twelve all told. A different fabric for each of the twelve dresses.”

Annie considered the cost. “Each roll has how many yards on it?”

“It depends on the fabric. Forty to sixty.”

Edna fingered a mauve silk. "You have enough here for dozens of dresses. Couldn't you get cut yardage?"

"For twice the price." Maude removed her hat and hung it on a wall hook. "Aren't we trying to sell more of the same dress once Mrs. Sampson's friends see them?"

Edna nodded, but her hand was at her mouth. "It's just a lot of money up-front."

Annie put an arm around her shoulder. "That it is. Such is the cost of starting a new business."

"It's the Sampsons' money," Maude said.

Annie objected to her flippancy. "That doesn't mean we shouldn't be wise and frugal when we can be."

Maude pushed a stray hair off her forehead. "I assure you I could have spent us into tremendous debt."

"We thank you for your restraint," Annie said.

The driver began to carry in the other ten rolls. Maude tipped the man.

The twelve rolls on the table complemented each other—by design. Since they were all going to be shown at the Sampsons' during a single party, Annie thought it would be visually pleasing to present a unified ambiance of autumn greens, blues, coppers, and ivories.

"When are the models arriving for measurements?" Edna asked.

"They should have been here by now." There was a knock on the door. Annie opened it with a welcome. "Come right in, miss—"

It wasn't a miss but a boy. "This here's for you," he said, handing Annie a note.

She read it and sighed. "The two friends of Mrs. Sampson who were in charge of gathering *their* friends to be models send their regrets. They can't come today—or model at all."

"None of them?" Maude said.

"Apparently not."

"So much for Mrs. Sampson's influence." Edna sank into a chair. "Without models we have no measurements, without measurements we can't make the clothes, and without clothes we have no soiree."

Annie took it a step further. "Without a soiree we have no business."

"We're stuck," Maude said. "A cart without a horse."

"A chicken without an egg."

“A—”

“Don’t be so morose.” Annie was rather surprised *she* was the hopeful one. “This isn’t the end, but merely a bump in the road. Since Eleanor’s models bowed out, we get our own.”

“Where?”

Annie pointed to the open windows. “There. Listen. Our models are all around us.”

Edna and Maude joined her at the window. Mothers called to children, working girls hurried to and fro, and women sold their goods from pushcarts.

“Some of them are almost pretty, but most are quite ordinary,” Maude said.

“Mrs. Sampson’s customers should be looking at the dresses, not the women wearing them.”

“Or caring about which wealthy family they represent.”

Maude bumped into Annie’s shoulder and whispered, “I will not have Mrs. Doonsbury wearing one of our creations. She has absolutely no waist, and her bosoms sag toward her toes.”

It was a rude—though accurate—assessment of the woman who ran the butcher shop nearby. “We can be a bit picky, but not too,” Annie said. “Could we ask Mildred and Velma from Macy’s? And perhaps Suzanne and Dora from Butterick?”

“And your friends Iris and Jane from the Tuttle’s bakery,” Edna added.

“Iris is about to give birth. But perhaps Jane.”

“And seven other girls right here in the neighborhood. Most will think it’s a lark to wear such pretty clothes.”

“That’s the spirit. Let’s gather some models.”

“Perhaps if they agree, we could take their measurements right then and there,” Maude suggested. “That way I could start making the patterns.”

“Sean and I are due for a visit to the Tuttle’s anyway,” Annie said.

“There’s no time like the present,” Edna said.

Maude took up her hat. “I agree. You head to the Tuttle’s this evening, and Edna and I shall gather some models of our own.”



The heady aroma of fresh bread greeted Annie and Sean as they entered the Tuttle bakery.

Upon seeing them, Mrs. Tuttle squealed and rushed around the counter

to give Annie a hug. "It's been far too long, girlic." Then she held Annie at arm's length and studied her. "*Tá tú ag iompar clainne.*"

"What?"

"Yer expecting, ain't ye?"

"I'm impressed," Sean said.

"So it's true?"

"It's true," Annie said. "How did you guess?"

"After having five of my own, I have a sixth sense about it. You're looking rather peaked and worried." She touched Annie's chin. "That means you're having a girl." She winked at Sean. "That all right by you?"

"I am fine with either gender," Sean said. He turned to Annie. "Peaked? Are you feeling all right?"

"I'm fine. Really."

"If a mother-to-be is glowing, it's a boy. If they look haggard, it's a girl. If you'd like to do the ring test, I could tell for sure."

"The ring test?"

"You give me a strand of your hair and I attach a ring to it. Then you lie down and I dangle the ring over the baby. If it starts to make a circle it's a boy; if it swings side to side, it's a girl."

"Who thinks of these things?" Sean asked.

"Wise people with years of experience," Mrs. Tuttle said.

Annie remained skeptical. "So the ring correctly predicted the gender of all five of your children?"

"Three out of five." Mrs. Tuttle shrugged and their attention was drawn to Jane coming forward from the rear of the bakery, wiping her hands from washing pots and pans. At the sight of them, the girl beamed.

"How nice to see you!" Jane gave Annie an embrace. Then out of habit she put her raw hands behind her back. While staying with the Tuttles, Annie had taken over Jane's washing chores for a short while until she was hired at Macy's. She knew the backbreaking endless work of it.

Mr. Tuttle finished helping a customer then locked up for the night. He handed Annie and Sean two rolls. "Last o' the day."

"Come sit," Mrs. Tuttle said. "You can eat, and we can have a visit." While Mr. Tuttle started covering the leftover loaves, the rest of them moved to the back of the narrow shop and sat at a table.

"Where is Iris?" Annie asked. "How is she faring?"