

THE CARLISLE SERIES: BOOK 1

TRUTH *AND* MEASURE



Roslyn Sinclair



CHAPTER 1

“I’VE NEVER CARED FOR YELLOW,” Vivian Carlisle said absently, looking over the editorial spread. “It’s so garish. Even in pastels.”

Most people would assume her comment was a casual observation. Jules Moretti, not most people, knew it was the calm before the storm and decided this would be a great time to stare intently at the notes on her tablet.

Who was today’s unlucky target? It couldn’t be her. Vivian didn’t make a habit of discussing aesthetic preferences with personal assistants. It must be somebody a lot higher up the ladder than Jules but still below Vivian. Like Simon, the creative director. Or Angie, head of copywriting. Or God.

But when Jules looked up, unable to take the long silence, she was skewered by Vivian’s eyes looking directly at her from across the desk. Simon and Angie had left the room, and the heavens remained resolutely silent.

And when Vivian Carlisle said a thing to you and then looked at you, you had about two seconds to figure out whether or not she wanted you to say something back. Jules’s two seconds were halfway up.

She thought fast. She didn’t wear a lot of yellow and she wasn’t wearing any today, and there *were* models wearing yellow in the spread, so Vivian wasn’t critiquing Jules personally. At least not yet.

Think. Think. Think.

“They’ve done studies,” Jules heard herself saying. “People think yellow’s supposed to make you feel cheerful, but it doesn’t. It can actually make people anxious.” Something more seemed called for. “Uh, pink makes them calmer, actually.”

Did that qualify as thinking? Maybe it was more like shoving her head underwater and shaking it around rapidly. Vivian had no patience for fools. That remark probably qualified as foolish.

Vivian raised an eyebrow.

Jules suppressed the urge to inform her that sometimes prison cells were painted pink to keep the prisoners happy. It might be taken the wrong way.

Instead of calling her foolish, Vivian looked back down at the spread on her desk.

Jules braced herself.

“Mallory,” Vivian said.

Jules already had her message app pulled up, and she fired off a summons. This wouldn't be pleasant. Mallory had worked at *Du Jour* for two years now as a photography director. She'd come up with cool, innovative spreads that had put her first on Simon's radar, then Vivian's. Her last project had lacked that flair, though—Vivian had called it “vapid.” This was strike two, and Vivian would make sure Mallory felt the whiff of the baseball as it barely missed her face.

Mallory seemed to sense this as she hurried in, glancing around at the sleek, midcentury furniture and the huge windows that offered amazing views of Manhattan. Mallory fit right in with it, as tall and slim as a skyscraper, clad head to toe in the latest designer fashions.

She was elegant and gorgeous, and she tried so hard. She wanted it so much. Too much. Radiating that kind of attitude in front of Vivian Carlisle was like throwing chum to a shark.

“You wanted me?” she asked breathlessly with that mixture of adoration and terror that Vivian seemed to inspire in everyone.

“Hmm.” Vivian didn't look up from the spread on her desk. Her eyes traveled over the A3 paper with its photos, captions, and copy. “There's a lot of yellow in this spread, Mallory.”

She went pale. “Er. Well, yes.”

Have to do better than that.

Vivian continued as if she hadn't heard. “Studies have shown that yellow is a color that causes anxiety. Isn't that right, Julia?”

Jules's stomach dropped. She'd never liked Mallory much, but she hadn't meant to trip her up. “Uh,” she said feebly, “that's what I...I mean, somewhere, I read...”

“*I’ve* never read that,” Mallory snapped.

That made Vivian look up at last, in time to see Mallory toss her chestnut hair back over her shoulder.

“My job is to care about style, not pop psychology.” Mallory finally deigned to glance at Jules. “Are you researching a paper for school or something?”

The hell? Mallory had been at *Du Jour* for less time than Jules! “I graduated three years ago from—”

“Okay.” Mallory turned back to Vivian. “The truth is, I’m trying to provoke a reaction in readers. I, um, want to make them anxious.”

Bullshit. Jules pressed her lips together to silence a scoff.

“You do?” Vivian asked neutrally.

Mallory should have known better than to take this as encouragement. Vivian didn’t do encouragement. “Well, sure. Fashion’s about pushing the boundaries, right?”

“I assume that question is rhetorical.”

Mallory gulped. “And you know anxiety can be a part of that, right? So...that’s what I was doing. It was on purpose. Kind of edgy.”

“Edgy.” Vivian picked up the spread proof and held it at arm’s length. She was probably trying to get the whole picture, but it looked more as if she were holding out a piece of particularly smelly garbage. “Let’s see this copy. ‘Romantic Winter: Get cozy in style with the latest trends to help you look your best as you snuggle in front of a fireplace.’”

Jules repressed a snort.

Mallory squirmed as Vivian glanced at her again.

“Edgy,” Vivian repeated.

“Um, I guess I can see how it’d look—”

“This is pathetic.”

Mallory snapped her mouth shut.

“It’s one thing to make a bad choice. I would *think* you’d know not to associate the color yellow with snow, but I would obviously be wrong.”

“I—”

“But that isn’t your problem, Mallory. Your problem is that you don’t listen, that you refuse to admit your mistakes, and that you’re convinced of your own genius for reasons that completely escape me.”

Oof. This was painful. Next up: Vivian would put Mallory on notice.

Mallory threw her shoulders back. “When Simon hired me—”

“When Simon hired you, he made a mistake. But unlike you, he’ll own up to it.”

Mallory went even paler.

“Pack up your desk and be gone by lunch,” Vivian said.

Yikes. So much for strike three—Mallory was already off the team. Jules looked at the wall and kept her best poker face. *Didn’t see that coming.*

Nobody argued with that tone of voice. Mallory swallowed thickly, turned, and walked out of the office.

Jules slowly released a breath. She didn’t like Mallory, but that hadn’t been any fun to watch.

“Julia,” Vivian said.

Jules pressed her lips together and looked back at her boss.

Vivian Carlisle was a striking woman. With her famous platinum blonde hair, shattered pixie haircut, eyes that bordered on electric blue, and bone structure that belonged in a makeup ad, she grabbed unwary mortals’ attention right away. Her Greek nose would have earned her a place of honor in ancient statuary. She was rail thin and pretty tall—a few inches taller than Jules, who was five foot six. She still wore four-inch heels every day as if she wanted to take up all the space she could. Vivian wasn’t Hollywood gorgeous, but models and celebrities paled in her shadow.

Arresting. That’s what she was.

“Tell Simon to replace Mallory,” Vivian said.

Jules clutched her tablet to her chest and nodded.

“And remind him of the budget when advertising the salary,” Vivian added, sounding annoyed about it.

She nodded harder and turned to go.

“Did I dismiss you?”

As a kid, Jules had played a game called Freeze, where you put your body in awkward poses until the designated person called, “Freeze!” then held still in whatever position you were in for as long as you could, and the first to fall over lost.

It was like she was playing it all over again, as she stopped in place, half-turned away from Vivian with one foot in the air. “No?” she ventured.

“No. This needs fixing as soon as possible, and I need you to take notes.” She placed her hands to either side of the spread and looked it over with a frown.

Jules pivoted and came to stand across the desk from Vivian, tablet and stylus at the ready. *Hands steady, girl. Keep it cool.*

For long moments, Vivian remained silent as she looked over the spread. Jules couldn't help thinking of an orchestra conductor examining the musicians before raising the baton.

“We need a complete do-over,” Vivian said eventually. “Simon convinced me to greenlight it, but if this is the best we can do, then Romantic Winter is the wrong concept.”

“You want a do-over?” Jules squeaked. “As in...”

“As in a new concept. New sketches. New photo shoot. And we have to do it fast.”

“Won't that be expensive?”

She didn't even dignify that with a response, just picked up the large sheet of paper and ripped it in two, right down the middle.

“Mallory *was* on to something with ‘edgy,’” she continued. “That’s a meaningless concept, but we’ll define it. I’m thinking...” She trailed off and stuck her tongue in her cheek as she looked into the distance.

“We’ll combine ‘edgy’ with intimate,” she finally said.

Those don't seem to go together. She couldn't help picturing two people cuddling while holding knives. Why did Vivian want something like that?

As if Jules had spoken aloud, Vivian said, “I want the spread to hold two ideas that seem contradictory but work in harmony. Not compromise”—she said that like it was the dirtiest word she'd ever heard—“but completion.”

“I can message the creative team to brainstorm and—”

“Nothing as clichéd as a snowfall or a ski lodge,” Vivian mused as if Jules hadn't spoken. “Definitely not a cozy cabin. We need a contrast. Something startling, something unexpected.”

Jules tried to think of somewhere cold that wouldn't be a total cliché. “Maybe something like a snowy field under a gray sky?”

Vivian held up her hand. “I said unexpected. Although a snowy field's an improvement on the cabin.”

Not much of one, she didn't add, but she didn't have to.

“Right,” Jules mumbled, face burning hotter than ever as she took notes. *Unexpected. Contrast. Intimate/Edgy.*

“Not romance,” Vivian continued. “Loneliness. Winter’s not just a time or place but a state of mind. Everybody’s locked up at home, trying to keep warm. We’re not going to depress readers,” she added just as Jules was starting to feel really depressed. “We’re going to surprise them. The spread’s going to be about connection instead of isolation. We can show the harshness of winter while *also* showing that it doesn’t defeat us. Stylishly, of course.”

Jules’s mind began running like a hamster on a wheel. Where would you shoot something like this? A lonely city block? Behind an abandoned warehouse? You could easily find those locations in New York, and the cost didn’t have to be...

“A desert,” Vivian said.

Jules’s hand paused over her notes.

“What do people think of when they think of deserts?” Vivian continued. “It’s the opposite of a snuggling before a hearth. It’s primal. No water, no sustenance. You against the elements.”

“And we think of heat, but it’s really cold at night,” Jules said eagerly. “So that’s the unexpected part. I camped in the Sonoran once, and—”

“We’ll shoot it at sunrise. Have the models start out in layers. That lets us feature sweaters and jackets. They’ll huddle together for warmth—fighting that sense of loneliness that winter can bring. We should also see their breath in the air. Then, as the photo spread goes on, they lose the layers and you see the outfits underneath. Their body language becomes more open as they adapt to the environment, to the contradiction.”

Jules scribbled frantically. Good grief. Mallory had probably worked on her concept for weeks, and Vivian had pulled this one out of thin air in moments? It was enough to make you dizzy. “Adapt. Contradiction. Okay.”

“The Mojave will do.” Vivian frowned. “It’s a shame there’s no time to go international. Snow in the Sahara is incredibly striking.”

“It snows in the Sahara?”

“Every once in a while. They had a snowfall a few years ago. That was in January, though.” Vivian’s frown deepened as if in disapproval of the irregular schedule.

Jules couldn't help imagining Vivian standing atop a Saharan dune, ordering the skies to dump a bunch of snow onto the sand in October. And the skies obeying her.

"We'll dial up the cool tones in editing," Vivian said. "Take this to Simon and tell him to get it right this time. I don't want to have to deal with this again."

Now she had been dismissed. Feeling as if she'd just staggered out of a whirlwind, she nodded and turned to go.

"University of Pennsylvania, wasn't it?"

Jules played Freeze again. Then she slowly pivoted back to face Vivian.

"You did a double major in communication and English," Vivian added. "Or something like that."

It was the effort of a lifetime for Jules to keep the shock off her face. Vivian remembered where Jules had gone to college? Vivian remembered what she'd *majored* in?

"English and communication at Penn, yeah," she said, trying to keep it cool. "I'm from around there. Outside of Philly."

Vivian frowned.

"Philadelphia," Jules mumbled.

"Simon," Vivian repeated.

And with that, Jules fled the office. It felt like the luckiest escape of her life.

CHAPTER 2

WHEN JULES ARRIVED AT HIS glass-walled office, Simon looked up and sighed. “What did she do?”

“Fired Mallory.”

“Ah.” He removed his reading glasses and rubbed the bridge of his nose.

She didn’t blame him for getting a headache. She’d served as his assistant before Vivian poached her, and there wasn’t a harder working creative director in the business than Simon Carvalho. Many times, he and Jules had burned the midnight oil as he tried to make creativity and capitalism play nice together: reaching out to advertisers, wrangling hot-tempered artists who didn’t want to sully their hands with business concerns. It was exhausting.

Vivian’s frequent power plays didn’t make it any easier. Jules had spent many hours at Simon’s side wondering why Vivian couldn’t just relent a bit. Working with Vivian directly hadn’t enlightened her as she’d hoped.

“I thought Mallory would get one more shot,” she said. “She’s done good work in the past.”

“Welcome to fashion, where the past will only be relevant in twenty years. Maybe we’ll see Mallory then. In the meantime, don’t question Vivian’s decisions. At least not to her face.”

Like I don’t know that. “She says to remember the salary budget in the next job ad.”

Simon sighed. “I wonder if Mark’s finally getting to her.”

She had to agree. Mark Tavio, chairman of the Koenig publishing group, was nobody’s favorite human. Top executives weren’t usually known for being warm and fuzzy types, but Mr. Tavio was a special kind of sour.

Sometimes it seemed he had it in for Vivian personally. If Vivian hadn't rescued *Du Jour* from folding five years ago, Jules had a hunch he'd have tried to get rid of her.

True, Vivian wasn't the easiest personality in the world. Jules still smelled misogyny in the room. Hard to avoid when a man resented a woman who was better at her job than he was at his. Among Mr. Tavio's petty tactics: summoning Vivian to his office for updates that only wasted her time, constantly implying that she was on thin ice, and neglecting to include her in company-wide decisions. Somehow, though, she always managed to influence those decisions, whether she was invited to the meetings or not.

Simon rolled his shoulders with a grunt. His pink dress shirt looked crisp, and the navy blazer draped over the back of his chair complemented it perfectly. He had what most people would call above-average looks—tall, broad-shouldered, hazel-eyed. But when you spent every day surrounded by models and actors, above average turned into *meh*.

Jules often felt it herself. She was cute, not dazzling. This job could be a real blow to the old self-esteem, if you let it.

"You okay?" she asked.

"About Mallory? Eh. Easy come, easy go. I'll have a hundred applicants for her position." He gave Jules a hopeful look. "Would you like to go through a hundred job applications for me?"

"Sure thing," she said. "I'll just swap places with you, and you can do my job all day."

"At my current salary?"

"Totally."

"Not enough. We both deserve to make a million bucks a year. Just wait for it. The day will come." Simon tapped his mouth with one long finger. "Speaking of a million bucks, you look like that today."

Sweet! Jules had hoped *someone* would notice the RIXO floral print skirt. She couldn't resist swaying her hips so the silk crepe swirled around her calves. "Fifty percent off."

"Don't be gauche. I do like that line."

So did she. The RIXO fall collection had been exactly to her tastes: free-flowing and exuberant. Her days might be strictly regimented, but her clothes didn't have to be.

"Was there anything else from our glorious empress?" Simon asked.

Shoot. Jules had hoped not to mention this part. “She said we have to get it right this time.”

“‘We’ meaning *moi*. My fault—I sold Mallory’s idea too hard. That’ll be fun to recover from. Do I have new marching orders?”

“You know you do.” She handed him her tablet with the notes.

He skimmed over them. “So much for keeping to the budget. Of course she wants to re-do the whole spread.”

“Fast, too.”

“Naturally.” He read the notes again, looking more attentive. “But...”

“But you like it better than Mallory’s thing, don’t you?” she asked.

“Oh, shut up.” He returned the tablet. “Send this to me ASAP. I’ll make it happen.”

“You always do.” Jules smiled and turned to go.

Simon cleared his throat. “Before you scoot, has Vivian mentioned anything—is there any more news about...”

She waited.

He huffed out an impatient-sounding breath. “You know, her divorce.”

“I doubt I’ve heard anything you haven’t.” Simon was Vivian’s second-in-command. If she trusted anyone implicitly, it was him. Surely, he wouldn’t be less well-informed than Jules. “He dropped the bomb on her, he’s out, and I’ve already scheduled a meeting with her lawyer.”

“I can’t decide which is worse: Vivian’s strategy of having three husbands or mine of not having any.” He looked morose. “This industry is hell on relationships.”

“Oh, great.” Jules rolled her eyes while she opened the door. “Now he tells me.”

Simon’s wry chuckle followed her.

* * *

That night, as Jules flopped onto her sofa with her phone, she found her mother had more to say about Vivian’s divorce than Simon had. Specifically, she had a lot to say about how it should serve as a warning to Jules: “Remember what happened with Aaron. Make sure you don’t end up like your boss.”

That wasn't fair. Aaron had dumped Jules last year after being unreasonable and insisting she work an eight-hour day and be off every weekend, which, *come on!*

She had tried to laugh around the cold pit that opened up in her stomach. "Mom! I'm nothing like Vivian. I have a life outside of work."

"Really?" her mom said tartly. "Then maybe sometime you'll talk to us about something other than your job."

Ouch.

When she disconnected, Jules looked down at her phone's screen until it went dark. Then she sighed, got off the sofa, and headed for the kitchen to get water.

She loved her Lower East Side apartment. Jules was luckier than lucky—her maternal grandparents had purchased the one-bedroom when they were young and when the area was less than savory. It had stayed in the family, and now Jules had six hundred square feet all to herself on the condition that she paid her parents for the utilities and half the property taxes.

Her parents had upgraded the place about ten years ago. The worn carpet had been pulled up and the original hardwood floors refinished. Nothing fancy, but it was perfect for a generation of renters who'd been here before Jules had moved in.

Since Aaron had left and taken his dirty laundry and band posters with him, Jules had been able to redecorate. She'd watched YouTube tutorials on painting and spent hours priming and taping and cursing. Now she had an accent wall covered by squares and triangles in alternating colors of aqua, salmon, and yellow. It looked pretty cool. Vivian never had to know about the yellow part.

An assistant's salary didn't stretch far, especially when she had to prioritize clothes, so most of Jules's furniture was family hand-me-downs. Nevertheless, she'd splurged on a contemporary coffee table and a Moroccan-style rug. She'd made her own curtains. She was satisfied with the place for now.

Jules sat at the kitchen table and looked moodily at her water glass. In spite of herself, her thoughts wandered back to her conversation with her mom. Okay, maybe Jules wasn't a relationship expert. She still had to be better than Vivian, who had nobody to blame but herself.

It was easy to see that Vivian had known her marriage was in trouble for a while. Jules had given ever-more elaborate excuses when she called the soon-to-be-ex, financier Robert Kirk, to cancel dinner or a date on Vivian's behalf and had seen her texting him with an increasingly furrowed brow. She had even on one occasion overheard her voice crack when talking to him.

So why hadn't Vivian been able to compromise with Robert, to try and be more available to him?

In the months she'd been working here, Jules had seen that Robert was clear about what he wanted: for his wife to spend time with him. It was hardly unreasonable. No, this divorce hadn't been sprung on Vivian out of nowhere. So why hadn't she acted to prevent it?

Not Jules's problem, except when it came to canceling the dinners and scheduling the lawyer. It was time to put it out of her mind. She sighed and reached for her computer.

Now for her second job.

She opened the laptop and glowered at the Google doc that had been waiting patiently for her return. Another article she was slaving away at in the hopes that this time it would go somewhere. Last time *The Cut* had sent her a personalized rejection email, which was more than she'd gotten before. Now that she was on their radar, this effort had a chance to land.

It had to land quickly, though. This time she was writing an article about Jimmy Choo's collaboration with Timberland to create an haute couture hiking boot. It'd be old news by the end of the week, even though the boot was selling out in Bergdorf.

Why? Jules's article asked. It was the same as a regular Timberland boot, except it had crystal trim and cost \$1,300. Why was such an unnecessary, extravagant item flying off the shelves?

She knew the answer: the boot was a status symbol. People would still click on the headline, eager to read about the excesses of the wealthy.

It wasn't an article about climate change in *The Atlantic*. It could be a step on the way to a real career, though. If Jules could elevate the topic beyond clickbait, argue that this stuff mattered and get her name in a national publication...

It was all about the baby steps. Jules had to start somewhere, and successful writers grabbed opportunities as they came. Everyone said so.

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She had to grab this opportunity fast. That meant another sleepless night.

Maybe Aaron had a point after all. Maybe both he and Robert did.

No, dammit. It wasn't the same thing, and Vivian's messed-up priorities weren't Jules's. Sure, Jules had ambition, but she had humanity too. They didn't have to be at odds.

And she'd show Vivian Carlisle it was possible, even if it killed her.

Not that she wanted to tempt fate or anything.

CHAPTER 3

AS THE WEEK WENT ON, the idea of proving anything to Vivian began to seem laughable. Something was going on with her, and Jules didn't like it.

She wasn't looking well. Her pixie never had a hair out of place and her lipstick was always perfect, but there was a tired look in her eyes Jules had never seen before. An outsider might not be able to tell, but it seemed obvious to someone who was at Vivian's beck and call 24/7.

Meanwhile, Jules wasn't on top of the world either. *The Cut* had rejected her Jimmy Choo article, and she was too busy to think about her next effort. Back in college, she'd thought breaking through would be easier. She'd written a lot of local pieces and even landed a guest column in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* about the rise of student housing costs. Turned out investigative journalism wasn't her forte, but she'd developed an unslakable thirst for writing nonfiction, gravitating toward pieces on fashion and its cultural significance.

Too bad nobody else seemed thirsty for what she had to offer. *Next time*, she told herself.

As crappy as she felt, Jules still wouldn't trade her place for Vivian's. In the middle of a long Thursday, she walked into Vivian's office just in time to see her rub her hands over her eyes. Her shoulders slumped. She looked utterly miserable, in a Vivian-ish way.

Jules cleared her throat. Vivian started and looked up.

"Um," Jules said, wondering why she'd even opened her mouth, "you're good to go for the meeting with Mr. Tavio tomorrow."

A sour twist of the lips let Jules know how Vivian felt about that. No wonder. It was obviously a half hour set aside for Mr. Tavio to posture, complain, and waste her time with another power move.

“Wonderful,” she said dryly.

“Uh, yes. Do...you want me to get you some coffee?”

Great. No, stupid. If Vivian wanted something, she'd ask for it. You never offered to do things. She didn't want to hear your voice when she was trying to—

“Water,” Vivian said and looked back down at the photos on her desk as if Jules hadn't spoken at all.

Jules made it to the mini-fridge by her desk in record time. When she arrived with the Perrier, Vivian didn't look at her but reached up and took the bottle directly from her hand. Her fingers brushed against Jules's.

They had never touched before. Jules fought not to snatch her hand back because she felt the shock all the way through her body, which must mean she hadn't liked it, right? When you touched someone and felt it reverberate from head to toe, that didn't mean you *liked* it.

That'd just be idiotic.

Instead of jumping backward, she managed to drop her hand to her side in a way that hopefully looked natural. “Is there anything else?”

Vivian looked up as she brought the bottle to her lips. A thoughtful crease appeared between her eyebrows as she regarded Jules. After a sip, she said, “Are you growing your hair out?”

Jules touched the ends of her dark wavy hair. It was nearly past her shoulders now. “I guess so. Just haven't made it to the salon lately.”

“Get the ends trimmed,” Vivian ordered, “but it suits you longer. You seem to be using adequate products.”

It took Jules two stunned seconds to say, “Thank you.”

Vivian wasn't finished. “Use the assets you have, Julia. Play them up. You haven't made a bad beginning”—the gaze she swept up and down Jules's body was entirely clinical, but it felt like lightning—“but you'd benefit from taking more risks. Try high-waisted pants.”

Jules looked down. She'd never had enough confidence in her hips to try those. Mainly because she had hips. That was a tough sell around *Du Jour*. “Really?”

“Mm. There’s a Katharine Hepburn biopic in the works. It’ll have award buzz next year. Get ahead of the trend and grab her look. You can pull it off.”

Jules was five foot six with curves and a tiny waist, and she was a big fan of flowy fabric. She’d never exactly thought of herself as a Hepburn type. “Well, I’ll...”

“Am I going to get a call from Christian Siriano before I die?” Vivian glared at her. “I’m starting to wonder.”

Jules opened her mouth to say, *I’ll get right on it*, but Vivian had already returned to work and was back to ignoring her.

Yeah. Something was definitely going on here.

* * *

The next five days at *Du Jour* were frenetically busy. The Mojave shoot had to be done right away, which meant spending exorbitant sums. Meanwhile, two of the models for the LA shoot had backed out and one had been fired. Agencies were offering dozens of potential replacements that had to be screened before the glossy eight-by-tens finally made it to Vivian’s desk. Insurance might or might not come through. Mark Tavio was making even more growling sounds about costs. Jules suspected Vivian might be forced to listen to him.

She was forced to do a lot of things, most of them involving moving around a lot. Meetings, lunches, attorneys, and late nights all meant that Vivian didn’t have a single quiet moment, and therefore, neither did Jules. Vivian practically kept her in her back pocket. They often didn’t leave the Koenig Building until one in the morning, only to stagger back inside at eight. And Vivian, who usually operated as well on two hours of sleep as she would on ten, looked to be on the verge of collapse.

Everyone was worried. Jules caught herself exchanging nervous looks with Simon more than once as they watched Vivian struggle to remember a name or an appointment. Jules tried to be more vigilant than ever, doing her best to anticipate Vivian’s every need. This wasn’t any easier than usual, and she was afraid she was going to give herself an ulcer.

By the end of the week, it was obvious—to Jules, at least—that Vivian wasn’t just stressed out or unhappy. Something was really, really wrong.

It was half-past midnight on Sunday, and she'd canceled her brief appearance at Marc Jacobs's party that evening in favor of working. So of course Jules was working on a Sunday night as well, sitting at her desk within sight of Vivian so she could leap into action at a second's notice.

Vivian seemed even less happy than her. More than once, Jules caught her staring off into space and appearing unaware of her own surroundings. Was she losing it? No wonder, with the way her life was falling down, and she wasn't giving herself a moment of peace and quiet.

I'm not like you. She watched Vivian glance out the windows for what seemed like the thousandth time. *Nope, not me. Definitely not.*

Even Simon wasn't here at this hour. Jules and Vivian were the only ones in the office, and Jules had nothing to do. She couldn't call anyone, and Vivian was fully updated on everything. To be fair, she wasn't just killing time—she was inundated with emails, with copy, with decisions she had to make. The LA shoot was in a week, and everyone was panicking. But Vivian didn't actually need Jules for anything except, apparently, silent company.

Jules had a copy of *This is Not Fashion* hidden in her desk drawer, though, and with a little luck, she could hide it in her lap and read it without Vivian noticing. King Adz's history of streetwear was something she'd been meaning to get to for a while. The pictures of cityscapes grabbed her imagination, especially those in Europe and Asia. There was something about the way towers and skyscrapers coexisted with older, even ancient, buildings. Might that not be reflected in style as well? Clothes and accessories that seemed to clash at first but combined to tell a unique story about the wearer?

It wasn't too different from what Vivian had said about fashion being completion, not compromise. There might be an article in there somewhere. Jules had just started making notes when Vivian called out, her voice hoarse (though she hadn't been talking to anyone), "Water!"

She sighed silently, tucked the book back inside the drawer, and hurried to fetch a bottle of Perrier from the mini-fridge. When she headed into Vivian's office, she froze inside the doorway.

Vivian was staring off into space, as white as chalk. She was biting the knuckle of her right index finger, her eyes wide. She looked petrified. Jules's stomach twisted at the sight of it.

She cleared her throat.

Vivian jumped at the sound and stared as if she'd forgotten Jules was in the office.

Jules set the glass on Vivian's desk, trying not to let her hand shake. Vivian looked at the glass as if she'd never seen anything like it before.

"Here you go," Jules said brightly.

Vivian looked up at her with even less comprehension than she had at the glass.

It took every ounce of self-control not to ask, *Are you okay?* You never asked Vivian Carlisle stupid questions that had obvious answers. Clearly, all was not okay.

Then Vivian spoke. "I..." she said and dragged one shaking hand across her forehead. "Thank you."

Thank you? She never thanked people for doing the basics of their jobs. Jules's hands started to get cold from nerves. What the hell was going on here?

Vivian took a careful sip. Then she set the glass back down, swallowed hard, and hid her face in her hands, breathing deeply.

"Vivian!" Jules gasped, but Vivian held up one hand for silence. Jules realized that she was trying not to be sick.

How long had this been going on? For that matter, had Vivian even eaten dinner tonight? Jules realized that she hadn't been dispatched to get any food that evening and that Vivian had canceled her lunch, which meant she hadn't eaten since breakfast. If she'd had breakfast.

Vivian lowered her hands, taking another deep breath. "Well," she said.

"Do you want me to call a doctor?"

"No, not yet."

The "not yet" made Jules's heart start racing in panic.

Vivian rubbed her hands over her face. "God. I haven't even had a moment to myself in...I haven't been able to..."

Jules waited. When nothing else seemed forthcoming, she blurted out, "Is there something I can do?"

Vivian glanced at her.

"I mean, get you something to eat, or...?"

Tapping her fingers on her desk, Vivian stared off into space again. The haunted look was back in her eyes.

Jules's insides started to squirm like snakes.

"I need you to go to the store for me," Vivian said quietly after a moment.

Jules was trying to work out whether she meant Hermès, Blahnik, or Tiffany's—and how to tell Vivian that all three were closed for the night—when she realized Vivian had paused.

"Okay," Jules prompted after Vivian hadn't spoken in nearly thirty seconds.

Vivian drummed her fingers against the desk again and appeared to finally come to a decision. "Bring me back a pregnancy test."

The room seemed to dip and sway for a second.

Vivian darted her a quick, sharp look.

Operating purely on instinct, Jules nodded and said, "All right. Be right back." Her voice contained only its usual helpful inflection. Then she was walking past her own desk, grabbing her purse as if in a dream, and standing in one of the gleaming elevators that would take her down to the lobby, from which she would walk to the streets, which would look the same as they always did, and...

Holy. Shit.

It made sense, even if Vivian was kind of...old for this at forty-two. The exhaustion, the nausea, the—whatever else. Jules didn't know much about being pregnant, all things considered.

But she'd had a pregnancy scare herself in her senior year of high school. It had been the worst forty-eight hours of her life before her period had finally shown up. Was Vivian feeling anything like that? Surely not. She was a grown woman worth millions, not a scared kid afraid of missing college.

Who was the father? Was it Robert's? It had to be Robert's. Because wouldn't Jules have noticed by now if Vivian was sneaking around? Vivian couldn't possibly be very far along, and Robert had bolted so recently. Apparently he'd loved her and left her. Asshole.

The closest Duane Reade drugstore was half a block away. Jules frantically scanned the "family planning" aisle. There were several tests available, each one claiming to be the best on the market. Jules had a feeling that Vivian would be even less patient about this than she was about everything else, which meant Jules had to decide fast. So she grabbed two

boxes: one promising *99.9% accuracy!* and another proclaiming *Doctor Recommended!*

Christ. If Vivian was pregnant, if the kid was Robert's, what would that mean for the divorce? Surely they'd halt it or at least delay it or—

It wasn't her problem, she tried to tell herself, waving her pass at the night security guard when she passed back through Koenig's revolving door. Vivian's private life wasn't her problem, and she wasn't going to concern herself with anything about it.

She kept telling herself this until she arrived back at *Du Jour* and saw Vivian whirl around from the window to face her. Trembling, Jules set the plastic bag down on the desk.

Vivian glanced at it, sat down, and began working on her laptop again without another word. Jules gulped and headed back to her desk. She'd never be able to concentrate on her book now, and she hoped Vivian would send her home soon. Surely she would because of course she'd want to go home herself and...

All of a sudden, there was a flurry of movement. She watched in speechless horror as Vivian stormed past Jules's desk and into the private restroom, the pharmacy bag clutched in one white-knuckled hand.

Here? She was going to do it here? *Now?* With Jules right outside her office? Fuck. Oh fuck. Jules did not want to be here when Vivian came out of that restroom. Vivian probably wouldn't want her to be either. Should Jules leave? Would that be the best thing to do, and tomorrow they could pretend like nothing had ever happened?

Even as she thought about it, Jules knew she wasn't going anywhere. And so the minutes crawled by. She finally looked at her watch and realized Vivian had been in the restroom for twenty minutes.

What the hell was going on in there? Had she fallen and hit her head? Was she trying to drown herself in the sink?

Just as Jules was wondering if it would be a bad idea to check on her, the door opened and Vivian emerged. One look at her face told Jules everything, but before Vivian could meet her eyes, Jules bent down and pretended to study the surface of her desk.

Vivian returned to her own desk.

Jules didn't look up.

"Julia." Her voice was thick.

Jules headed on unsteady legs to the door of her office. “Yes?” she whispered.

“Tomorrow,” Vivian said, staring vacantly into the distance, “schedule an immediate appointment with my doctor. And contact my attorney as soon as his office opens. Eight o’clock. Sharp.”

“O-of course.”

“Call my driver.” Vivian rubbed her forehead again. “Let’s go home.”

Right. It was past time to call it a day. Jules helped Vivian put on her coat and walked her to the elevator, where she stood stock-still in the car, not speaking.

What the hell did you even say to someone at a time like this? Congratulations? Condolences? She didn’t even dare look at Vivian.

“I don’t believe this,” Vivian said.

Jules froze.

“I don’t,” Vivian repeated.

Jules finally turned to look at her, just in time to see Vivian close her eyes. “I’m sorry,” she whispered. Then Jules heard herself blurt out, like a total idiot, “You know, whatever I can do—of course I’ll...”

Vivian ignored her completely. “Wait until Mark Tavio finds out,” she muttered, then laughed bitterly. “Well. If our chairman thinks he can use this to get rid of me, he’ll get to know my lawyers on a personal level.”

Jules bit her lip.

“What?” Vivian demanded.

“Nothing.” Jules shook her head.

“Say it.”

Okay, then. Okay. “So...you’re going to keep it?”

Vivian was silent for so long that Jules wondered if she’d heard. Then, just before the elevator doors opened at main floor, she spoke, sounding bewildered. “I don’t know.”

They stepped into the lobby. Vivian headed for the exit, apparently without noticing that she’d just become irrevocably human to Jules at last.

Once they’d reached the car, Jules held the door open. “I’ll make all those calls as soon as I get here tomorrow,” she promised.

“Get in,” Vivian said without looking at her and slid in herself.

Jules stood, stunned, for a moment. Even as she walked around the car, she considered sprinting down the sidewalk. Vivian had decided that she

must be silenced; she was going to have her driver take them down to the docks, kill Jules, and then dump her body in the river. Or worse, Vivian was going to think of something else for her to do before going to bed and trying to process the day.

But all Vivian did as Jules buckled her seat belt was lean back against the headrest, close her eyes, and say, "Take me home, and then drop Julia off at her apartment."

"Yes, ma'am," Ben said as he smoothly pulled into the street.

Jules was getting personal chauffeur service after the working day was done? That had never happened before.

She wasn't about to question it. Just ride in silence; just let Vivian rest. She needed a break. She needed a lot of things, most of which Jules couldn't give her, but Jules could manage a peaceful car ride.

When they'd gone four blocks, she dared to look at Vivian out of the corner of her eye. Then she blinked in astonishment. Vivian had slumped against the window. Her eyes were closed, and she was breathing deeply. She'd fallen asleep.

Jules met Ben's eyes in the rearview mirror. She blushed without knowing why. But Ben's own eyes were wide, and she realized he was as astonished as she was. Almost five years of driving Vivian around and apparently he'd never seen her sleep in the car before.

When they got to Vivian's Upper West Side home, she was still sound asleep, and Jules realized she had to wake her. She didn't have the courage to touch her. You didn't just touch Vivian.

She cleared her throat loudly and watched Vivian twitch into wakefulness, inhaling through her nose. Then Jules looked out her window so Vivian could pretend no one noticed her sleeping.

At the sound of Vivian unbuckling her seat belt, Jules turned her head and managed a weak smile. "Thanks for the ride."

Vivian's brow furrowed. Her hand fumbled a little as she finished unbuckling, and she blinked sleepily. It would have been cute if it had been anybody else; as it was, it was a little scary. Without a word, Jules undid her own seat belt, got out, and hurried around to open the door for her.

By the time Vivian was on her feet and on the sidewalk, she appeared a little revived, perhaps because of the cool air. She gave Jules a quick glance

as if waiting for something. Jules had no idea what, but she blurted out before she could stop herself, “The tests could be wrong.”

Vivian narrowed her eyes.

Jules winced and hunched her shoulders. Yeah. Okay. Shut up.

Vivian turned and mounted the steps to her house without a word.

Still cringing, Jules got back into the car, but Ben didn't drive away until they'd both seen Vivian get safely through the door.

“What's going on?” he asked as he pulled away.

“She had a long day.”

“She's had lots of them lately,” Ben said. “I've practically taken to sleeping in my uniform just so I can be ready to go whenever you call me.”

“At least you get to sleep,” Jules said snidely

Ben only chuckled. “True enough. Try and get some sleep tonight, okay? You look like you're dead on your feet lately too.”

“What else is new?”

He chuckled again.

Jules had a hard time following Ben's instructions. She should have been exhausted, but instead she shivered with nervous energy. She paced her apartment, looked restlessly out the window, and opened her laptop to see that *The Cut* was still open in her browser.

Maybe the third time would be the charm. There was a column called “I Think About This a Lot” that wasn't for news or think pieces but open submissions from readers. The subjects ranged from movie scenes that had deeply affected them to confessions about their marriages.

“I think about my pregnant boss's disaster of a life a lot,” Jules said to herself, trying out the title. Then she laughed, the sound a bit sharp and hysterical. That was catchy. She'd probably get published. Then murdered. Put six feet under by Vivian Carlisle.

The thought wasn't helping her get to sleep, but it made her laugh again. She'd take what she could get.

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TRUTH AND MEASURE

BY ROSLYN SINCLAIR

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