

kids who just heard the ice cream truck.

"I take it Rigazzo's sculpture is coming to Chicago?" Vanessa asked.

"Design Commission called this morning. Rigazzo agreed and the committee approved," he said.

Vanessa turned toward her screen and clicked on the promotional budget.

"Well, let's hope the gala does well so we have plenty of money to publicize it," she said.

Realizing Elyse would be a little late, they began running through the final plans for the gala. As they reviewed the menu, music, and lighting, Vanessa was getting more and more excited. It was shaping up to be the hottest ticket in town. No expense spared, no detail overlooked.

Still, Shay's concerns about the weather were starting to tug at the corners of her mind. As the group finalized the timeline, they heard a light knock. Vanessa looked up to see a clearly distraught Elyse.

"We have a problem."

23

Elyse

"WHAT DO YOU mean there's no money?"

The panic in Quinn's voice was like an infant's cry to Elyse. She was still processing the news herself. She would have preferred to return to her office and consider the options, but she was already late for the gala meeting and everyone who could help her find a way out of this mess would be there. She took a deep inhale and looked into their anxious faces.

"Apparently at last week's board meeting, Charlie mentioned the possibility of getting *Iron Crescent* and his plan to move some things around in the budget to pay for the transfer and installation. But as it turns out, a few board members had been working behind the scenes with a museum in California that collects costumes from a variety of films. They voted to use the remaining special exhibit funds to borrow the collection for the summer."

Quinn and Shay looked crestfallen. Vanessa seemed unphased. Elyse couldn't decide if it was because she wasn't

in New York as this was all forming or if she didn't fully understand the gravity of the situation for art lovers. The sadness on Quinn's face slowly gave way to annoyance.

"So, you're telling me we have the chance to get Paul Rigazzo's infamously dejected sculpture for all of Chicago to see but instead we're funding an indoor exhibit so a fourth grade class can come and see E.T.'s costume?" Quinn asked.

"Oh, I think it's more nuanced than that," Vanessa chimed in. "Doesn't the Met have a costume institute?"

Shay gave a light chuckle and Quinn politely turned his head before rolling his eyes. Elyse felt a familiar wave of sympathetic condescension. In recent years, some had begun to see the fashion industry as an extension of the art world. Where one stood in this debate was the litmus test in many circles. Poor Vanessa found herself the lone voice in a group of colleagues who were in agreement on this point. Fashion was not art.

"Wait, you said *last week*?" Quinn asked. "I've spoken to Charlie about this deal at least twice since then. Why the hell didn't he say anything?"

"Honestly," Elyse said, sinking into a chair. "he didn't think Rigazzzo would ever go for it. He was surprised the deal went through."

"So, that's it?" Shay asked.

Elyse leaned back. "Well, perhaps not," she said. "Charlie mentioned that recently, the gala's been bringing in more money than they'd budgeted for. If that trend continues, we can probably make this work."

Quinn and Shay seemed relieved at the thought as they listed off reasons this was a distinct possibility. Vanessa sat silent.

"So this is on *top* of the boost in funding promised to the publicity department?" Vanessa asked.

Elyse could see something resembling panic in Vanessa's eyes. She'd forgotten about Charlie's promise to use any surplus to better support their work. Elyse sat up, looking directly at her.

"Yes, of course," she lied.

She wasn't entirely sure Charlie had factored this in when he suggested the gala as a possible source. Vanessa's unblinking eyes fixed resolutely on her own.

"Just so I'm clear," Vanessa sat up straight, spreading out the gala papers on her desk. "The gala, which is only weeks away, must be successful, not just so Shay and I have a budget to effectively do our jobs. We now need to have even more for the transfer."

The edge in Vanessa's voice caused Elyse's sympathy to shift to defensiveness. But if it showed in her demeanor, Vanessa didn't seem to notice. Or perhaps she didn't care. Vanessa rose and handed each of them a different folder from her desk.

"So, let's get to work."