

## Chapter Seven

### Pink is The New Red Flag

My two-week notice grows into three when the property owners fail to find my replacement. But it gives me more time to forward my résumé, pack and e-mail apartment searches to Beau.

“Babe, did you get a chance to look at the last one I sent you? It's a cute 1-bedroom in Harlem.”

“I'd rather stay in the Queens area, close to my studio.”

*Queens?!! Call me a zip code snob, but I have no desire to set up roots there. Besides, I've been to your roach-infested studio one too many times to know that I am not impressed by that area.*

“But I was interested in finding employment in Harlem.”

“That would be over an hour and half commute every night for me,” Beau voiced. “And once the bridal season kicks into high gear, my long hours at the studio would have me arriving home at all times of the night. But there will be convenient trains for you to catch once you secure a job.”

“I guess I need to find out where I'll be working,” I rationalize.

We compromise that we will neither live in the area of Queens where his studio is nor Harlem; instead, my savvy internet researching found a less gritty area called Briarwood, a tree-lined, manicured community in Queens, within a half-hour of Manhattan. Close to my beloved's studio, yet accessible to trains for my interests.

“I can't set appointments with brokers right now and commit to my clients,” Beau announces. “Can you hold off for a week or two?”

Unfortunately, time runs out for my comp townhouse, and the only option is to temporarily crash at Ma's.

“Are you sure you have room for my boxes? I can put them in storage.”

“Why waste money when you can stack them here until you move?” Ma questions.

I should have listened to my first instinct. The day of the move is as cold as it gets, and after renting a truck and getting a family friend to lift the heavy stuff, we arrive at her rental home. Her PACKED rental home. I quickly catch myself from hyperventilating.

“Ma – this isn't going to work,” I announce, glancing around at the wall-to-wall clutter in the two-story-house-condensed-down-to-one (she hates stairs).

“All I have to do is push the washer on the back porch to the corner, and rearrange some stuff,” she reasons.

*It's going to take more than rearranging a washing machine to get me through this...*

NEW LUXURY LOW-RISE WITH WASHER, DRYER & DISHWASHER 2 BLOCKS FROM THE BRIARWOOD VAN WYCK STATION.

The e-mail listing Beau sends is a welcoming sign of spring. The pictures reveal a railroad-style layout; a far cry from my former townhouse's 1214 sf open floor layout, but if it takes me out of the fortress of stacked boxes and my futon perch in Ma's front room, who am I to complain?

“Babe, it has everything: A/C, dishwasher, hardwood floors, TOP floor... I'm so proud of you!”

“It damn near killed me, trying to handle my client load and setting up a time to meet the broker.”

“Wait! Where's the washer and dryer? In a closet?” I interrupt him, as I look over the pictures.

“See it? It's in the kitchen, to the left of the sink. It's a combination washer/dryer, which takes up less space than those stackable sets.”

“Oh.” *Never heard of such a thing...*

“And it's a brand new building, so we landed a gem in Queens!” he brags.

“So when can I head there?!”

“Well, here's the thing. The broker is asking for four months rent upfront, and I only have a portion of it right now.”

*Did he just say four months? Based on my six years in property management, that only means one thing; somebody's credit is JACKED.*

As if he were reading my thoughts, Beau continues. “I have some things on my credit that need repairing. The other option is putting your name on the lease as a leaseholder.”

*OH, HELL NO. Think fast.* “But they also rely on an applicant's salary, which I can't verify until I get a job.” *Good answer.* “So how much are you short?”

“Fifteen hundred.”

“I'll wire it to you tomorrow.” This is a no-brainer, seeing that it is for our future home together. I'm just relieved to know my days of living in my mother's house will all be coming to an end. Besides, Beau already said he was picking up the cost of my one-way ticket. One way; that sounds so good...

“When will you be able to sign the lease?”

“I've got to schedule it between my appointments. Plus I have to rent a truck to get the furniture out of storage, and then get some of my boys to help me. So in about two weeks or so. And I need to buy your ticket.”

“I'M SO EXCITED, Babe! I can't wait to get there!”

“I can't *wait* for you to get here.”

I hang up the phone and mentally plan what I'll pack in my carry-on: my black suit for interviews, my black pumps, jeans, my arsenal of lingerie, my toiletries. The rest of my wardrobe, my extensive shoe collection and desktop computer will have to be shipped.

“Ma, Beau just told me he'll be ready for my arrival in two weeks.”

“Hmmp.”

Always the pessimist, she has a history of suffering from separation anxiety, and this time will be no different. Misunderstood by most, I know she's pretty much like a state fair pretzel: salty on the outside, soft on the inside.

But for reasons Beau blames on his strained schedule restricting him from signing the lease, the two weeks morph into four. With no income coming in, I begin to tap into my savings to treat Ma to daily breakfasts, lunches and dinners to get us both through this unexpected month of delay. It actually feels quite good, though, to spend this quality time with her.

Finally, Beau is ready for me to come, and I bid my hometown and family adios. With directions to the new apartment in hand, I feel as though my flight into New York City is taken without the help of the plane. Beau will be at work around the time of my arrival, and would be meeting me at our new place.

I love the savviness of New York City cab drivers; never flinching at the inundation of addresses given to them.

“Where you goin’?”

“84<sup>th</sup> Road in Briarwood, near Main Street in Queens.”

“Hmm; is that near the library?”

“I don't know the street intersections; this will be my first time going there.”

“I gotta an idea of where it's at.”

Unfortunately, the cabbie didn't quite get this one right. We end up in the area he assumed, but the streets and numbers are not jiving with the address.

“Babe, I'm at the corner of 82<sup>nd</sup> Drive and 141<sup>st</sup> Street. We can't find the building.”

“Tell him to head back towards Main Street. He's on the wrong end.”

We finally finagle our way through side streets just as Gotham City slips on its evening cloak. Beau is standing outside of the newly-constructed building, and I have this rush of emotions about this new point in my life. After tipping the cabbie, he grabs the handle of my rolling carry-on.

“Is this all you brought with you?” he asks after kissing me.

“I have never checked a bag in my life; I travel light.”

“Okay,” he laughs, leading the way to the golden brick building. “After I let you in, I have to run to the laundromat around the corner.”

“Why are you going to the laundromat? The apartment has a washer and dryer,” I say, rounding the corner to the second floor.

“Yeah, but I washed some blankets I had in storage. Oh, and the sofa? It has some stains from a leak the storage company had from all the snow melting this past winter.”

We reach the fourth floor, and I am relieved to see the setup of the building only grants us one neighbor across, versus a hallway of doors.

“Here's our new home,” Beau announces, unlocking the door and stepping aside.

There, in the narrow railroad-style apartment, awaits a textured sofa in stained cream. A 19-inch TV is hanging on for dear life atop one of those particle board television stands from a discount store. No bed, no kitchen set, no tables. No lie.

“I'll be right back,” Beau says after kissing me and handing me my set of keys, totally oblivious to my current state of shock.

*I gave up all my shit for THIS?!!!! What have I done?*

Even after Beau leaves for the laundromat, I'm still rooted in the same spot, staring at the brown spots that crawl like an oh-so-unfashionable animal print along the sofa sleeper. How can the poster child for germaphobia lay her head down on something so hideously disgusting, let alone sit on it? I don't get it; Beau knows my standard of living from the numerous trips he took to visit me in my town house. How he could possibly think I would be comfortable with this, is beyond my imagination.

I slowly walk through the brand new apartment, familiarizing myself with all the features I recognize from the pictures Beau e-mailed me. To the right of the entry is the kitchen, with all the appliances neatly condensed under the countertop. I was relieved and perplexed to see the dishwasher, still with a film of blue plastic on the door, underneath the sink as opposed to being next to it. The 2-in-1 washer/dryer combo was something I was going to have to get used to.

But the fridge was the one thing Beau was psyched about, with its built-in ice maker and water dispenser. Features that do nothing for me, for I like my water and ice formed from the bottles of France, merci beaucoup.

The bathroom takes my breath away, with its floor-to-ceiling marble bath enclosure. To the right is the bedroom, in all its compact glory. Mirrored sliding doors enclose a closet that will barely hold half of my wardrobe, but at least there is a coat closet next to the front door for Beau. The balcony at the end of the long living room is a little touch of luxury in New York City real estate, yet void of all privacy, thanks to being in direct view of multiple windows from the building next door.

I head to the coat closet that my Baby will have to make do with. To my horror, he has a three-foot pile of clothes on the closet floor.

“Hey Babe, I'm back,” Beau announces, carrying a large garbage bag.

“Um, Babe, have you sprayed the couch down with disinfectant?”

“I tried cleaning it with a steam cleaner, which got some of the stains out.”

*There were more stains than what I see? Oy vey! Steam cleaning still doesn't take care of the mildew.*

“We need to get ready for the concert. I told my boy Cliff to pick us up at my studio. I told all my friends about you, and tonight you get to meet them.”

“How much time do I have?”

“We need to catch the train in twenty minutes.”

So I hit the ground running in the Concrete Jungle. His group of friends are a festive bunch of older guys with young female friends. My age-defying looks and petite size deceive them, as they guess me to be ten years younger than my thirty-five years. We sing the night through an arena filled with old-school ballads, R&B hits and lively performances. Afterwards, our entourage of four couples - plus Beau's single cousin George - break bread at an all-night eatery, where I indulge in the most amazing turkey sausage links ever. They all laugh when I ordered more to go!

We arrive back at the apartment in the wee hours of the morning. A joint shower begins a night of sweet passion, soon followed by me falling fast asleep on Beau's shoulder. The safest place to be, considering the tainted mattress cradling me.