

*A*nne loved New York this time of year, when maple trees began to sprout emerald leaves but it was still cool enough to bundle up. If only she could stay here forever with Sergio and not go back to San Francisco.

A black-and-white-striped awning graced the storefront of Timely Treasures, listed as a “top ten New York City best bargain shop.” A bell jingled as she stepped inside. She closed the door behind her, blocking out the city noise, and was greeted by the scent of beeswax and lemon. She waited for her eyes to adjust to the dim light. Perhaps the owners kept them low to save money.

She pulled off her knit cap and put it in her backpack. Ducking her five-foot-eight frame to see into the nearest mirror, she squinted at her sorrel-colored hair. What a frizzy mess! She fluffed it upside down and secured it atop her head with a scrunchie.

She wandered the aisles stuffed with buffed antique furniture, *Erté* sculptures, knickknacks, and gewgaws. This shop was too upscale for thrifting, the wares too high-end. She’d only come in search of found-object inspiration for her artwork.

Turning to leave, she caught sparkly reflections from a back table—as if lit by a spotlight on a stage, pulling her toward them. As she drew closer to the satin-clothed table, an interesting display revealed itself: a pair of silver shoes rested atop a box, surrounded by a rope of pearls, a pair of cream-colored gloves, an enameled cigarette case, and a white marabou-feather boa.

She ran her fingers over the shimmery rhinestones that graced the shoe's two-inch heels. In vintage times, women didn't wear the soaring stilt heels of today. She picked them up. These shoes were made for dancing and might even fit her. The woman who had owned them must have had big feet, too.

Ha! Maybe a Rockette had even owned them. After all, they were in New York. Anne searched for the size but couldn't find one.

Sergio would get a kick out of them. Since he worked in the shoe business and was very generous with samples, the last thing she needed was another pair, but these really spoke to her. And Sergio might think they were sexy. He loved it when she wore sensuous footwear. They were so fancy, though. Where would she ever wear them?

All of a sudden the shoes grew warm, as if kissed by the sun, tempting her to try them on. A salesperson still hadn't appeared, so Anne pulled off her boots, slid her feet inside the shoes, and clasped the T-straps. Shifting her feet side to side, she admired how the leather moved, soft and supple. The best thing about buying used shoes was that someone else had worn them in for you. As she stepped along the aisle, a warm glow ran from the soles of her feet up to her heart and swirled there. Maybe they were magic!

She closed her eyes and clicked her heels three times, chanting, "There's no place like home. There's no place like home. There's no place like home."

"Are you planning to buy those?" A man stood before her.

"Oh!" She jumped. "You scared me!" She bent to unclasp the T-straps and slipped off the shoes, waiting for her racing heartbeat to subside. "How much are they?"

He took them from her and spoke dramatically. "They're in *perfect* condition. I'd say seventy-five smackeroos." In his suspenders, bow tie, and slicked-back hair, he reminded her of the emcee character in the *Cabaret* revival Sergio had taken her to last year.

She sighed and shook her head. “That’s too much.”

The man’s sad eyes penetrated hers. “Make me an offer.”

She glanced at the shoes again. She shouldn’t buy them, but she had to follow her instincts—they’d been right before. From the wallet in her backpack she offered him a bill. “How about twenty dollars?”

He paused for a moment and studied her. “Thirty and they’re yours.”

“Deal.” She took out a ten, picked up her boots, and started toward the counter. There went the rest of her bus money.

“I have more things from the same estate if you’re interested.” His hand swept over the other items on the table.

“No, thanks.” She shook her head, tugging her boots back on.

He wrapped the shoes in tissue and placed them carefully in the vintage box.

“May I have a bag instead?” she asked, placing the money on the counter.

“You must store them in the original box. The shoes are very valuable.”

If they were so valuable, why did he take thirty bucks for them? “I’m traveling and the box will be in the way.”

“Even so, I insist.” He held up the box. “Promise to never throw away the box.”

It didn’t look like much—a shoebox with barely legible Italian words handwritten on its side. Sergio could translate it this evening. She loved when he spoke Italian to her.

“Okay. I promise.” She shrugged and opened her backpack.

The man gently laid the box inside. “You’ll be glad to have it.” He eked out a thin smile and escorted her to the door. “Are you going on a trip?”

“No, heading home.”

“Where’s that?”

“San Francisco.”

The man nodded and put his hand on her shoulder. “That’s a stunning coat. Dior, correct?”

“Yes.” She stepped back.

“Lovely brooch, too. How much for both?”

The breath caught in her throat, and she clasped her hand over the rhinestone snowflake pin. It had been the connection between her and her dear friend Sylvia. When Anne wore the brooch and coat, she could still sense Sylvia’s presence.

“I’ll give you a good price.”

“They’re not for sale. Goodbye.” She fingered the key in the pocket of her black velvet coat and stepped out onto the sidewalk, relieved to get away.

She’d better hurry or she’d be late to meet Sergio. She skirted a construction barrier. A he-man type with bulging muscles threw debris out a top window and she had to duck. Dust particles flew into her hair as the mess fell into a dumpster on the sidewalk. Since she started visiting Sergio two years before, the economy had surged and New York developers were investing in renovations like mad. Housing costs had skyrocketed. She could never afford to rent an apartment here.

San Francisco was expensive enough. Without rent control, she’d never have been able to stay in her studio apartment the six years since she’d moved there. Hopefully, Sergio would invite her to move in with him. After all, this bicoastal romance had been going on for two years, and things were still hot and heavy. The lease on her San Francisco apartment had almost expired, and the landlady wanted her to sign another.

If Sergio didn’t ask Anne soon, she would need to broach the subject herself. They couldn’t keep up this long-distance relationship forever. If he told her no, she’d be mortified, and it might push her to break up with him. But she couldn’t imagine living without him.

Spring warmth filled the air. The New York sidewalks teemed with sailors, shoppers, and businessmen, all hurrying along in a noisy symphony of purpose. An automobile honked, shooing a horse-drawn carriage out of its way. A bicyclist zipped by. Sky-scrapers towered overhead like urban cliffs.

Clair saw the Chrysler building glinting in the distance. Its rounded tiers reminded her of a wedding cake.

Clair had the good fortune to be out on her own this sunny afternoon—Mrs. Schmidt, her chaperone, had come down with a cold. The sense of freedom put a song in her heart. She'd return home before her father did, and he'd never know the difference.

She tugged down her cloche hat, afraid it might spring off. Since she'd turned eighteen a few weeks ago, he'd made her wear it over her updo. "Your strands seem to have a mind of their own. Someone might imagine you're on fire!"

Aunt June said Clair's hair was the same color her mother's had been. Maybe that's why her father insisted she wear it up and covered, so as not to bring back memories of his beloved wife. "Your hair's your glory, never to be cut," he'd said. "And only for your husband to ever see down."

She shook her head and gazed at a pair of rhinestone shoes displayed in a shop window. Imagine dancing in them! Too bad her

father wouldn't allow her to wear them to her ball. He'd say they were too garish. A pair of *peau de soie* Mary Janes would suffice—at six feet, she towered over most folks already. Clair used to be able to talk her father into anything, but recently he had become downright particular, even grumpy. She had no idea why.

As she spun into Macy's through the revolving door, the store exploded with a plethora of color. She passed a perfume display, lace handkerchiefs in a glass case, and umbrellas in a stand. Hopefully, the department store would have some gloves that fit. Her ball was coming up fast, and neither Bergdorf nor Saks had ones large enough.

A snooty saleswoman at Saks had peered down at Clair's large hands and sniffed. "Try Macy's." Clair held back embarrassed tears. She tapped her fingers across her thighs, playing an imaginary keyboard. She had to look her best on her special night.

She studied the candy display, filled with lemon drops, peppermints, and licorice. Aunt June used to bring her here and let her pick a sweet. Clair always chose her favorite nonpareils, chocolate circles coated with white sprinkles, and ate each of them a different way.

The first one she'd crunch and chew for an immediate burst of pleasure. The next she would hold in her mouth, making it last as long as possible. Once she even held a piece in her palm until it melted, made sure no one was watching, and licked it off. She wasn't a naughty girl, but she couldn't help herself.

Things were much easier then. The only decisions she had to make were which candies to choose. But she was no longer a child. Soon she would be a part of society, so she had to play the part of a perfect young lady.

"Miss, may I help you?" The man behind the counter broke her reverie. She couldn't resist buying a bag of nonpareils and nibbled on one as she wandered toward the back of the store.

A short, round salesgirl approached her. "That looks delicious!" Taken aback, Clair held out the bag. "Want one?"

“I couldn’t.” The blonde’s curls bounced as she shook her head. “Well, maybe one.” She took a candy from the bag, popped it in her mouth, and held it closed as her Wedgwood-blue eyes lit up. “Mmm.”

She must be the *savor in your mouth as long as possible* type.

No, the girl chewed and swallowed. “My favorite!”

“Mine, too.” Clair smiled.

The girl eyed her. “Nice hat. I could make one bigger to fit over your hair better.”

Clair didn’t know how to respond. “Where would I find the gloves?”

“I’ll show you!” The girl swayed across the store to a long cabinet against the wall. “Cream or white?”

“Cream.”

She pulled out a long drawer, set it on a nearby table, and held a pair of gloves to Clair’s raised hand. “Much too small.” The girl shook her head.

Clair sensed her face turning red. She had heard that so many times before.

“What lovely long fingers you have!” The girl took Clair’s raised hand. “They fit your body so well. Sometimes a person’s hands will be really small, and their bodies look too big for them. Sometimes it’s the opposite—too big of hands on a small body.” She looked Clair up and down. “But your hands suit you just right.”

“Thank you.” Clair had never thought of it that way.

“My gloves are short and wide. See, short hands. Short body.” The girl wiggled her fingers and drew her hand down toward the ground.

Clair smiled. “Interesting.”

The girl returned to the drawer and rummaged through it, making an absolute mess. She handed another pair of gloves to Clair. “These should do.”

The rich cream color would match her pearls exactly. Clair

slipped the gloves on and ran the smooth texture along her cheek. "Satin." She easily pulled them up to her elbows.

The girl rubbed Clair's fingers to check for size. "Perfect. They fit like gloves." The girl giggled. "Isn't that funny? They *are* gloves!"

Clair laughed, too. They were so comfortable she hated to take them off.

"Where are you going to wear them?" the girl asked.

"My coming-out ball."

"How exciting! Your own ball." She gazed at Clair as if she were a princess.

A man approached them, and the salesgirl stood erect. "Hello, Mr. Smithers."

"Winifred." He nodded through his wire-rimmed glasses, owlish eyes magnified.

Clair swallowed and smiled at him. She'd hate for Winifred to get into trouble.

Winifred waited a few seconds until he walked away. "That's the manager," she whispered. "He's told us not to fraternize with the customers."

"Your name is Winifred?" What a stuffy old lady's name, it didn't fit her.

"Yes, god-awful, isn't it? My friends call me Winnie."

She probably had a lot of friends. Clair rolled off the gloves and handed them to her. "Thanks for your help. Send the bill to my father, Leland Devereaux at the Waldorf."

"Ooh. That fancy-schmancy hotel?"

Clair nodded.

"Shall I have them delivered?"

"I'll take them." Clair couldn't wait to slip them on again when she got home.

Winnie wrapped the gloves in tissue and put them in a box. "You know my name now. What's yours?"

“Clair. Clair Devereaux.”

Winnie shook Clair’s hand as if she were a man. “Enchanted.” Winnie giggled.

Clair had to learn more about the girl. She didn’t seem to have a care in the world. “How long have you worked here?”

“Six months.” Winnie lowered her voice. “But it’s only temporary.”

Clair glanced around to make sure Mr. Smithers wasn’t near. “Temporary?”

“Yes, I’m really a performer.”

“You are?” Clair had never met one before.

“I dance.”

“You do?”

“Yes, look how limber I am!” Winnie leaned over and touched her toes.

Clair couldn’t believe Winnie had actually done that in public!

Winnie rolled back up. “I sing, too. My boyfriend Rudy says I’m talented.” She paused. “Well, to tell you the truth, he’s not really my boyfriend, but someday he will be. He’s planning a big show, and I’ll be his shining star.”

“You don’t say.” Clair wished she had as much confidence as this warm, funny, vivacious girl, not always keeping her thoughts bottled up inside. Maybe if she had someone to talk to. She’d always had trouble making friends. At finishing school, the other girls made fun of her for being so tall, studious, and focused on her piano playing.

Winnie smiled at her. “Do you have a beau?”

Clair tapped her fingers against her thighs and shook her head.

“Don’t worry! You’re so pretty you will soon. I’ve had boyfriends since I was thirteen.”

“You have?” What did Winnie’s parents think about that?

“Sure.” Winnie handed her the package.

Clair looked at her watch. "I'd better be going. Thanks for your help."

Winnie put her hands on her hips and wiggled them up and down in Mae West fashion. "Why don't you come back and see me sometime?"

Clair covered her mouth to hide her laugh. She picked up the candy from the counter and noticed Winnie staring at the treats.

"Another?" Clair offered. Winnie helped herself. Clair had a good feeling about her, as if they had known each other for a long time.