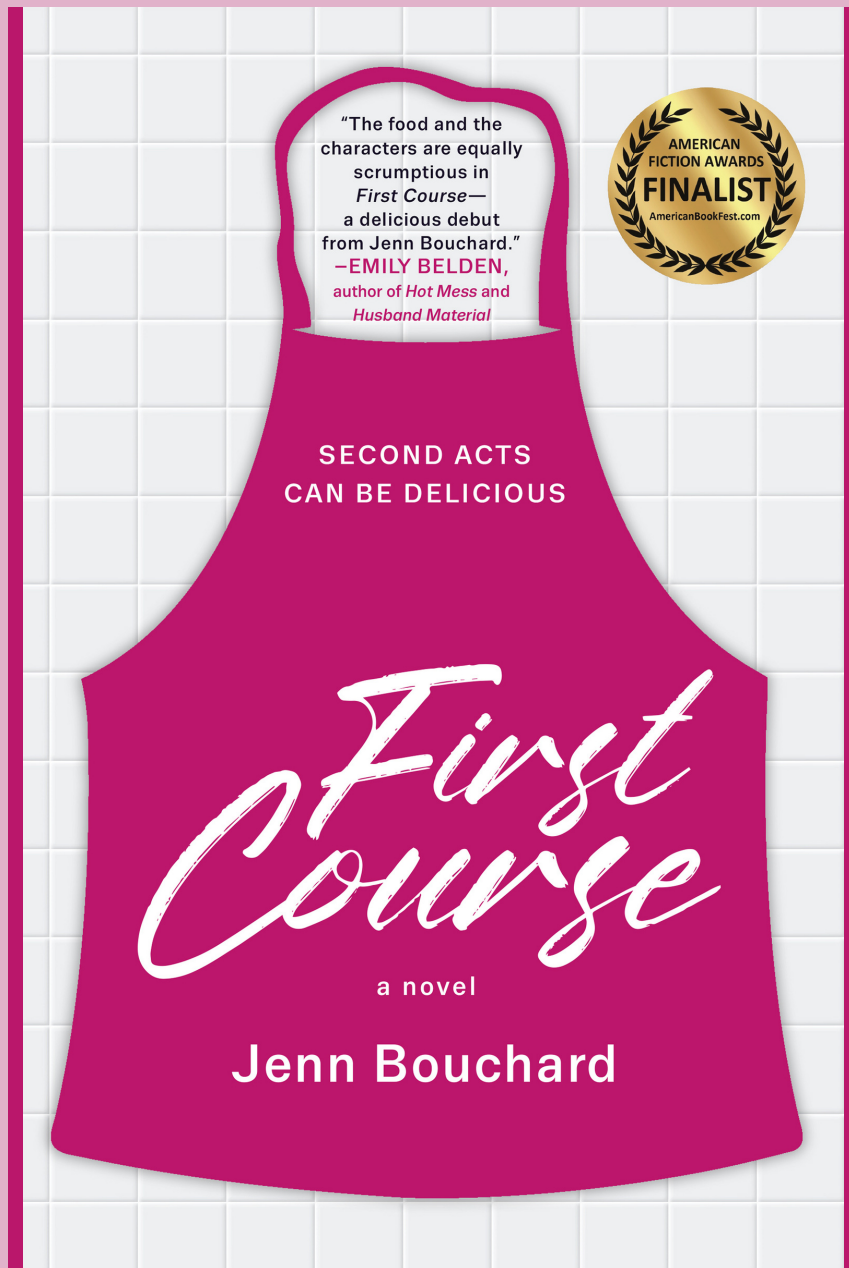


BY JENN BOUCHARD

FIRST COURSE

media kit



"The food and the characters are equally scrumptious in *First Course*—a delicious debut from Jenn Bouchard."
—EMILY BELDEN,
author of *Hot Mess* and
Husband Material



SECOND ACTS
CAN BE DELICIOUS

*First
Course*

a novel

Jenn Bouchard

about

Second acts can be delicious.

When four life-altering catastrophes hit in just one day—including the loss of her parents in a tragic plane crash—twenty-four-year-old Janie Whitman retreats to her family's summer house in Cape Elizabeth, Maine. Here she tries to provide stability for her older sister Alyssa and two young nieces by cooking them amazing food.

Through a mix-up with the alumni office at her parents' alma mater, Janie meets a young high school guidance counselor named Rocky at a volunteer event, and their fast-tracked romance helps Janie to see possibilities beyond the life she had known just a few weeks prior. But with her ex-boyfriend (and former boss) making overtures beyond her wildest dreams, as well as Alyssa's estranged husband willing to do whatever it takes to win her back, the Whitman sisters are faced with big decisions.

Despite the obstacles in their way, when Janie and Alyssa are tasked with establishing a lasting memorial for their parents, they just might find the second acts they are seeking.

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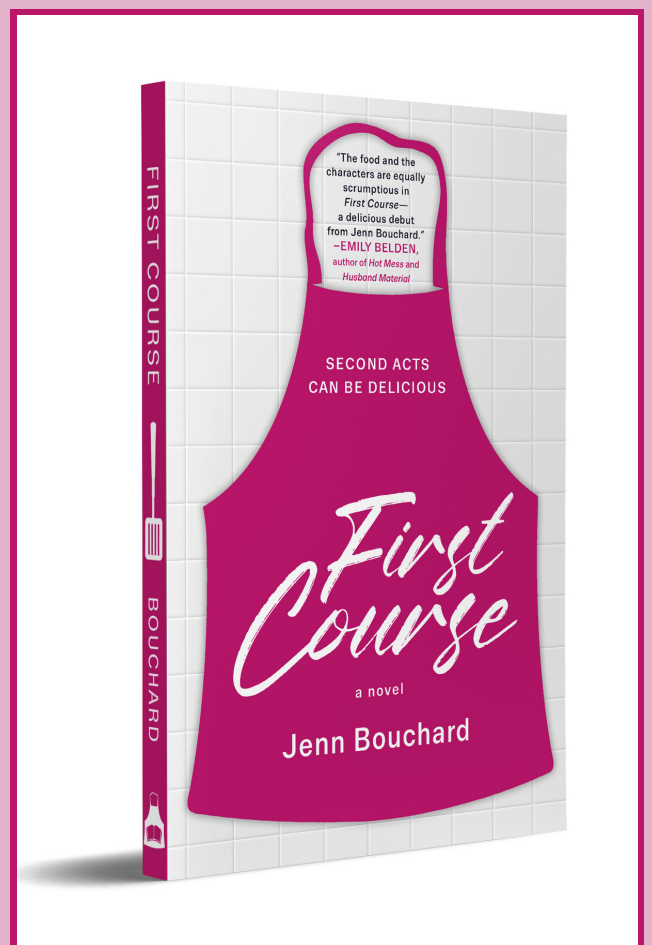
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JENN BOUCHARD

author

Jenn Bouchard has been teaching high school social studies for twenty years. She is an avid cook, volunteer for good causes, and devoted Red Sox fan. A graduate of Bates College and Tufts University, she lives in the Boston suburbs with her husband and two children. Visit her website at www.jennbouchard.com and follow her on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram @JennBouchardBOS.

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EARLY PRAISE

"The food and the characters are equally scrumptious in *First Course* –a delicious debut from Jenn Bouchard."

-EMILY BELDEN, AUTHOR OF *HOT MESS* AND *HUSBAND MATERIAL*

"I loved this story of reinvention and finding love when you least expect it. With charming characters and a setting that will have you rushing to book a trip to the Maine coast, *First Course* is the perfect book to tuck into your beach bag this summer."

-KRISTIN CONTINO, AUTHOR OF *A HOUSE FULL OF WINDSOR*

"In *First Course*, Jenn Bouchard finds the perfect recipe for a story—colorful characters and a compelling storyline—easily making the reader crave a second course."

-CHRISTINA CONSOLINO, AUTHOR OF *REWRITE THE STARS*

A Great Beach Read!

Jenn Bouchard's debut, *First Course*, is a sweet, romantic story about

Janie, a young woman who, after a series of traumatic events unfolding in less than 24 hours, learns how to pick herself up again and rediscover who she is as a sister, daughter, aunt, girlfriend..and cook. Bouchard's writing is snappy and smart and whisks the reader away on a virtual summer tour of Maine. *First Course* is the perfect book for readers to take on their own trip to the beach or pool.

-SARAHLYN BRUCK, AUTHOR OF *DESIGNER YOU* AND *DAYTIME DRAMA*

ACCOLADES

2021 American Fiction Awards Finalist (Women's Fiction)

2021 San Francisco Book Festival Honorable Mention
(General Fiction)

2021 Reader's Choice Nominee (General Fiction)

Featured in Serendipity magazine's "Summer Reading
Picks from Some of Our Favorite Women"

INTERVIEW WITH JENN

TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THE INSPIRATION BEHIND THE BOOK.

I had just finished a major volunteer position - I had been the President of the Bates College Alumni Association for two years. This had been an all-encompassing role for me that I loved, and when it was over, I knew that I needed to find something very fulfilling to take its place. I started toying with the idea of attempting to write a novel. I absolutely love coastal Maine, having spent a good deal of time there since I started college in the mid 1990s. I knew I wanted to incorporate cooking and my knowledge of how small colleges work with alumni. I started reading interviews with authors and going to hear them speak when I could. I took pages of notes and started brainstorming. Eventually, I began to put the story together.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE TO BE ABLE TO INCORPORATE YOUR LOVE OF COOKING IN THE STORY?

This was such a fun part of writing the book. I thought about being twenty-four again and the kinds of things that I might have made for my friends and family. I love preparing hors d'oeuvres and small plates. I also thought about food that I truly don't enjoy, which helped me in creating Meredith Ashton's character. That was a blast.

WHAT WAS YOUR FAVORITE PART OF THE WRITING PROCESS?

I have loved getting to know other writers and learning from them. I am so lucky to live in the Boston area and to be a part of Grub Street, which is a major writing center. I have also found incredible support and expertise from the Women's Fiction Writers Association. I greatly enjoy going to book events and connecting with other authors. I am all about community and collaboration, and I have found such joy in learning from these talented writers.

DID YOU LEARN ANYTHING WHILE YOU WERE WRITING THE STORY?

I learned a ton! I knew so little about the actual industry before I started this journey, so I made it my mission to learn as much as I could. I have spent time talking to people in virtually every aspect of the publishing business. I also should add that sometimes we learn the most from people turning us down. I had plenty of rejections along the way, but some people who said no were very generous and gave me incredible advice that helped me make my writing much stronger.

WHAT'S NEXT? HAVE YOU WRITTEN ANYTHING SINCE YOU COMPLETED *FIRST COURSE*?

I started a second novel and scrapped it; I just couldn't make it come together the way I wanted to. I took some of those characters and ideas and have started sketching out plans for a different book. I am hoping to start drafting this summer. I have written five short fiction pieces in the meantime. Three have been published in literary magazines, and one is scheduled for publication this summer. I hope to find a home for the fifth one soon. I found that I love writing short fiction! They all have a strong food/cooking component, and I think that's my niche.

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

In the Face of Major Loss, One Family's Love for Food is the Bond that Unites and Heals

Bedford, MA—June 21, 2021—Jenn Bouchard's debut novel is a romance novel following a woman and her sister as they navigate a major loss in the family and their individual experiences with heartache. “First Course” will be released June 21, 2021.

“First Course” incorporates descriptions of food and cooking and examines how familial bonds strengthen through the act of cooking and eating together. Bouchard says, “I wanted to write a story about life's second acts. I am a huge fan of Nora Ephron, and I loved how she so deftly integrated recipes into HEARTBURN while writing about love and loss. Coastal Maine was the perfect backdrop for a story about an imperfect yet endearing family and the role of food in figuring it all out.”

When four life-altering catastrophes hit in just one day—including the loss of her parents in a tragic plane crash—twenty-four-year-old Janie Whitman retreats to her family's summer house in Cape Elizabeth, Maine. Here she tries to provide stability for her older sister Alyssa and two young nieces by cooking them amazing food.

Through a mix-up with the alumni office at her parents' alma mater, Janie meets a young high school guidance counselor named Rocky at a volunteer event, and their fast-tracked romance helps Janie to see possibilities beyond the life she had known just a few weeks prior. But with her ex-boyfriend (and former boss) making overtures beyond her wildest dreams, as well as Alyssa's estranged husband willing to do whatever it takes to win her back, the Whitman sisters are faced with big decisions.

Despite the obstacles in their way, when Janie and Alyssa are tasked with establishing a lasting memorial for their parents, they just might find the second acts they are seeking.

About the Author

Jenn Bouchard has been teaching high school social studies for twenty years. She is an avid cook, volunteer for good causes, and devoted Red Sox fan. A graduate of Bates College and Tufts University, she lives in the Boston suburbs with her husband and two children.

About the Publisher

TouchPoint Press is a traditional publisher of fiction and nonfiction. Our staff is comprised of professionals whose collective experience in publishing, editing, journalism, design, and marketing set the stage behind our growing list of published titles. We are proud to work with talented authors and strive to be as innovative and energetic as possible from acquisitions to promotion before and after publication.

For interview and review requests, contact Jennifer Bond at media@touchpointpress.com.

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BOOK EXCERPT

one

VIENNA

THE WAY TOO FAMILIAR OPENING bars of Billy Joel's "Pressure" pulsed from Cole's phone, telling him it was time to wake up. His lanky body—clad only in plaid boxers—showed no signs of stirring. Suppressing a groan, I reached over him to shut off the alarm, and I kicked my boss out of bed. He needed to get in the shower and get to work before I did.

"You know that he's been on the phone pacing in his office for twenty minutes," Blair said to me as soon as I walked into my cubicle in our River North office about an hour later on that mid-June morning. He was sitting in my chair when I arrived, thumbing absentmindedly through papers on my desk.

"Really?" I whispered, glancing over at Cole's windowed closed door and swatting Blair's hand off my stuff. Cole was the only person at *Young Chicago* with a door that closed.

"How was he this morning?" asked Blair dramatically, in a hushed voice. I raised an eyebrow at him and shrugged my shoulders, feigning a faux innocence. Blair always tried to magnify the forbidden soap opera quality of my relationship, and I tried not to play into it. "Come on, Janie," he continued. "I am assuming that Mr. Emerson got that Northwestern travel mug from you, my love. Maybe you should add a UCLA one to your collection. Frannie the accountant might be getting suspicious."

"It's a local university. He could've gotten it from anyone." But he was right. In my bleary-eyed morning state, I hadn't even thought about the travel mug situation. Maybe Cole would like a mug from his alma mater for Christmas. I never knew quite what to get for him, as you can only buy someone so many live Billy Joel recordings. And then there was the age difference. Cole was 14 years older than me, and despite his relative immaturity, it was tough to figure out what to buy a guy in his late thirties with a trust fund. Nothing really impressed him. A travel mug might be nice.

"Earth to Janie," said Blair. "You look tired. Late night alphabetizing Mr. Hollywood's Billy Joel CDs? People his age still listen to CDs, right?" he asked teasingly. He was lucky that I liked him so much. I looked back over at Cole's office. Cole was now sitting in a chair, gripping his forehead, still on the phone. Things were not looking good.

“Okay, get out of my office. I need to write about these new tattoos that people are getting on their wrists. Apparently, this is all the rage around the city right now,” I said, trying to distract myself with work.

Blair chuckled. “Imagine what those are going to look like when these babes are 70 and their skin is wrinkled and saggy. No one is going to know that’s a flower or a clover or whatever. It’ll look like the grandkids got them with a Sharpie,” he said, examining his own unadorned wrists. “God help me if the boys all start getting them, too.”

“Ahh, but that’s why they will need to go to their dermatologists who can either remove the tattoos or use the latest skin-tightening or smoothing procedure. See, Blair, they need us to tell them where to go and what to do. We provide such a service.” I winked at him with false optimism. From the looks of things in Cole’s office, something was happening, and it wasn’t good. “And we can then change our name to *Old Chicago*. Which sounds way too much like Old Style Beer, and then *your* community won’t want to read us anymore, which is like half of our readership. But I digress. Go get something done!” I pushed him out of my cube and pretended to close my nonexistent door behind him.

I tried to push the feeling of dread out of my mind, knowing that Cole was in some sort of distress in his office. With a name like *Young Chicago*, it was probably doomed from the start. No one quite knew what the intended audience of the free print monthly magazine was, given its title. Office managers of pediatric practices assumed it was a periodical geared towards youthful families in the metropolitan area and ordered cases of it for their waiting rooms. They were subsequently not amused to find articles about the newest martini bars on Rush Street and the hottest places to meet singles in the Lakeview neighborhood. Conversely, the “young” adults who might enjoy these vodka-soaked articles weren’t sure if *Young Chicago* was actually meant for them. Needless to say, there were issues.

As a complimentary print publication, *Young Chicago* relied heavily on advertising for its survival. From my first day as a twenty-two-year-old employee straight out of Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University until now, almost two years later, I was very happy not to have the responsibility of securing advertisers to keep our “little engine that could” afloat. In our relatively small office over the cubicle walls, I could feel the stress and frustration from my two co-workers whose sole purpose was to sell blocks of space to tanning salons, bikini waxing estheticians, liquor stores, and whoever else might appeal to Chicago’s under-35 crowd. It was a tough job, and it seemed to be getting more challenging as time went on.

Despite the fact that I was worried about my boyfriend *and* boss, I tried to work. I talked to some tattoo artists as well as a few women who had gotten the tattoos. My attempt to write the article was half-hearted and weak as I knew something was wrong with Cole, so I surfed the web for funny clips of people yelling “Baba Booey!” at PGA tournaments to send to my sister. My 30-year-old sister Alyssa lived in our hometown of Concord, Massachusetts in a fairly buttoned-up existence with her husband and two children. She was tall, lean, classically beautiful with long brown hair and smooth, well-cared for skin, and dressed almost exclusively in Lilly Pulitzer. She went to daily exercise classes such as hot power yoga and frequently organized teacher appreciation weeks. Howard Stern was her top-secret guilty pleasure that she listened to in her car whenever she could sneak a few moments to herself. If the PTA moms knew who she really was, they would be horrified. I loved that she had a dark side.

The day slowly ticked on. Blair and I went out to lunch, forgoing our usual takeout sandwich or salad options for a sit-down lunch at nearby Hub 51, complete with a round of stiff cocktails. If the ship was possibly going down, we would sink with slightly less pain. Cole still had not left his office, and occasionally we could hear shouts and the sound of his slammed phone from the other side of his office door. He had not texted me or emailed me any edits on the outline of the tattoo story that I had sent to him mid-morning, which was very much unlike him. By three o’clock, Blair was looking on career websites for anyone seeking freelance journalist work. People worked all around us in our open-concept office, but as we approached the end of the day, tones became more hushed and fewer phones rang. There was a sinking feeling deep in my abdomen, and I don’t think I was alone. These were journalists, and they had good instincts. When Cole emerged at 4:15 that afternoon and summoned everyone to gather outside of his office door, no one seemed particularly surprised. We were ready for our sentencing.

“Hi everyone,” he mustered, with his voice cracking slightly. He was a tall, fairly handsome guy, and I loved him. I could tell that he was upset but was trying to stay strong for his employees, and I hated the distance that I had to maintain at that moment. “I’m sorry that I haven’t been very available to you today, but I have had to deal with some challenging communications from our parent company, Midwest Monthlies. They were purchased by a larger corporation this morning named National Print and Digital, and they are scrapping anything that hasn’t been profitable in the past year. As you know, we have struggled lately with finding our niche market and keeping our core advertisement base. This is no one’s fault; we are in a tough business as you are fully aware. You will all hear from the HR department at NPD in the next week as they work out severance and COBRA for your healthcare.” He paused, looking out over all of us. This was the most serious and flustered I had ever seen him. Cole

wasn't always the most mature, the most centered person—he had lived a fairly comfortable and spoiled existence—but at this moment, he noticeably felt the weight of the situation and the lives standing before him. “I am terribly sorry, you guys. I believed in us and what we were doing here. We had a really good run. If anyone needs a reference, give ‘em my cell. I’ll vouch for all of you.” He sighed and shook his head, as if he was still in disbelief by what had transpired in just a few hours. “Now we need to pack up our shit and won’t be able to get back in the building tomorrow. I am going to see if maintenance has any empty boxes to help people haul crap out of here. Let me know if you need anything.” He lowered his head and walked back into his office, keeping the door open this time.

Like everyone around me, after we digested the confirmation of what we had begun to suspect that afternoon, I started to pack up my things. I had been at the magazine for over two years, starting as an intern during my senior year at Northwestern. As I gathered papers and knick-knacks, folders and pictures, I realized that the laptop and iPad on my desk were no longer mine. I started backing files up on flash drives and on Dropbox, grappling with the awareness that I was not only unemployed, but I also had no technological devices beyond an outdated iPhone. And I would now have to pay for the data charges. Dammit.

By six o’clock, the floor was haphazardly littered with discarded papers and food wrappers and cups, the evidence of once-loyal foot soldiers who were frustrated with their new situation. Everyone was gone, except for me sitting at an empty desk with a laptop wiped clean and a blank iPad. My belongings were in two cardboard boxes and my backpack, ready to go to my apartment. And Cole, who was still sitting in his office, had been drowning out the sounds of his former employees’ packing with a stream of Billy Joel songs. For the past twenty minutes though, “Vienna,” the song Cole always listened to when he was in an emotional funk, had played on repeat. It was time to intervene.

“Hi,” I said, looking at the weary guy sitting back in his desk chair, hands folded behind his head, eyes closed. His dark hair was ruffled, evidence of him running his hands through it all day in frustration. The graying at his temples was more apparent, as the 38-year-old boy who in many ways had not wanted to grow up very much had been forced to age in the last ten hours.

Cole opened his eyes, looked at me, and gave a small smile. “What are you going to do now?” he asked.

Okay, small talk... we are getting back to more normal Cole-Janie relations. “I packed up everything into a couple of boxes and my backpack. I left the electronics on my desk. I think I will call an Uber and drop everything at my apartment. What do you want to

do? Say 'fuck it' and book some last-minute outrageous dinner reservation? It doesn't matter who sees us together anymore. That's one bright spot." I tried to brighten my face with a hopeful grin, but it felt forced.

He let out a small chuckle. "No, I mean next. Life. What's next for Janie?" Billy Joel began singing "Vienna" again. It was definitely on a loop.

Oh. "I hadn't gotten that far yet. How about after I drop off my stuff, we at least go get a drink and brainstorm? We can save the outrageous dinner for another time." Perhaps the answer was in the glass of some kind of craft cocktail. In all honesty, I had no idea what a 24-year-old with a journalism degree and experience at only one publication was supposed to do next. Cole had plenty of contacts and could likely help me.

He stood up and started putting papers into his workbag. "I've got a flight to L.A. tomorrow morning."

His mom lived in Los Angeles. I had only met her once briefly, as she wasn't interested in coming to Chicago to visit (too cold and "Midwestern" for her, as she had stated). She was a semi-retired pop star, who had one hit song in the 1980s called "Hot Pink Love." The proceeds were enough that she didn't have to do much with her life to bring in steady income, and Cole was set up with regular financial disbursements. From what he had told me, she spent her days sitting at her pool and occasionally socializing with other aging "artists." She went by the name Royale and was very tan and very thin. As a potential mother-in-law, she seemed terrifying, and it was always a bit of a relief when Cole didn't ask me to come along on the flight to the West Coast. The miserable couple of hours I had spent with her over dinner at the Ritz Carlton in Lake Tahoe a few months earlier had been enough.

"When are you coming back?" I thought it was a fair question, but I wasn't sure that I was going to like the answer. It turns out that my instincts were spot-on.

Cole drummed his fingers on the desk, not looking up. "It's a one-way ticket." He opened his arms up, and I climbed into his lap. It felt strange to act this way in his office after hiding our situation from everyone around us for its tenure, but none of that mattered anymore. The magazine was done, and it looked like the relationship was as well. This felt like goodbye.

I tried to squash every biting, sarcastic, snarky comment that was bubbling up in my brain and throat at the moment. *Don't call him a mama's boy. Don't call him a trust fund baby. Don't tell him to grow up. Is this how I really see him???* "What will you do there?" I asked, attempting to keep my voice steady.

He sat up a bit straighter, forcing me to shift my seat on his knees. "No idea. What are you going to do here?" Point taken, but I guess I unrealistically expected more out of someone fourteen years my senior. Anyway.

"I guess I don't know either. We only get a month of severance so it's not much time to figure things out."

"Janie, Janie. You've got your life ahead of you. Don't just sit in your apartment making hors d'oeuvres for the next month." There was a distinct possibility that I was going to do that. With cocktails. Aesthetically beautiful and delicious cocktails. "You have so many talents, so many gifts. You need to share them with the world. Remember, *Vienna waits for you*." I stared at him until he tapped on the framed, autographed picture of Billy Joel that still sat on his desk.

I got off of his lap and stood up. I felt anger building. *Enough*. "I've never understood this. What is Vienna? Am I traveling to Europe? I don't think so. I have thousands of dollars in student loans from Northwestern to pay." He was trying to be metaphoric and poetic, but he spoke from a different place than I did. He had "Hot Pink Love" money.

Cole gave a huge grin, disregarding my response that had bordered on yelling. I wanted to punch him in the face. "You'll find your Vienna. So will I. There's a big future out there for you, Janie. You're going to be great." He closed his eyes, sat back again in his chair, and started singing along with Billy. It was over. I stormed out, ordered an Uber from my phone, and got the hell out of there. Almost a year of my life and all I got was Vienna.

AVAILABLE JUNE 21

