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Annabelle Marin

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# BECOMING A GIBSON GIRL

VINTAGE BEAUTIES

BOOK TWO



ANNABELLE MARIN





## CHAPTER 1



"PLEASE, please, please come with me. *Please*. You know I hate shopping alone."

Twenty-two-year-old Winifred "Winnie" Woods sighed as she closed her laptop, knowing very well that her roommate Jennifer Nguyen wasn't going to stop begging her to go shopping with her until Winnie bent, like she always did. Then, again, she had always been kind of a pushover and a people pleaser, one of the many charms of growing up in the foster system. There had been no room for complaining.

She turned off her iPad, which had been playing a news segment about local missing medical student Lydia Allen, who had disappeared two months ago, in January. Winnie had been hearing non-stop about the "Allen girl" case since she also attended UCLA, though her status, she assumed, was less impressive due to the fact she was an undergraduate English student and was not medical royalty.

Winnie sighed as she pulled her dirty-blonde hair into a messy bun at the nape of her neck. She had been busy with midterms and hadn't properly washed it in who knows how long. She buried her chin in her blue sweatshirt, hating the fact

that it was the middle of March, and she was still freezing her butt off.

"Jennifer, you know I have this midterm paper due for my American Lit class in twelve hours, right? I cannot afford to flunk out two months before graduation."

Jennifer huffed as she threw Winnie a pair of rolled up jeans she had left on her bed in their tiny doom room ever since she had tried and failed to complete her paper in a timely manner. "Winifred Woods, you are probably the smartest person in this entire campus, and you know it. Believe me, you will be fine if you take a break and come shopping with me."

The blonde rolled her eyes as she shimmied out of her sweatpants and allowed herself to put on her jeans. "I hate when you call me that. It's such an old lady name."

Her friend giggled, obviously knowing she had won. She waved her car keys in the air. "I'll meet you downstairs. Don't take too long."

Winnie went into the small bathroom they shared and decided to at least brush her hair. It was the least she could do, though she doubted anyone would care on this depressing gray morning. She stared at her reflection in the mirror, wondering for the one hundredth time since she'd started her senior year what on earth she was doing with her life. Anyone else on this campus would probably have someone they could turn to, a parent, a sibling, maybe even an elderly relative.

Winnie had had no one since her birth mother abandoned her six-year-old self in a grocery store sixteen years ago. Since then, it had been at least a dozen foster homes under her belt, with experiences raging from depressing to mind-numbingly boring. Thankfully, she had been smart enough to earn a college scholarship and with any luck, she would be graduating in two months.

She frowned when she noticed a large pimple protruding on her chin and the dark circles under her pale blue eyes.

Maybe Jennifer was right, and she did need a break after all. With a quick pinch to her cheeks, she left the bathroom, grabbed her purse, and headed downstairs.

Jennifer was outside waiting for her, her fingers rapidly tapping on her phone, no doubt texting one of her many friends. She popped a piece of gum in her mouth as both girls headed towards her Mini Cooper parked a few feet away,

Winnie noticed a row of police cars a few feet away. "Did something happen?"

"Oh, *that*," Jennifer huffed as she ran a hand through her black hair. "I ran into Ingrid earlier, and she said the police officers are here again to find more information about the Allen girl. It's so annoying; they take all the good parking. She had an apartment off campus, so I don't know why they still check the dorms. Idiots."

"Well, she was a student here."

"Still, it's been two months. I doubt the girl is still hanging around school. I heard she crashed her boyfriend's car. Her family is loaded. She's probably hiding in Hawaii for all we know."

If her roommate noticed she was lost in her own thoughts, she didn't say anything; instead, she just seemed to turn on the radio louder. Normally, Winnie appreciated Jennifer's upbeat and bubbly personality, but for some reason, today, she just wanted to curl into bed, feeling sorry for herself. Maybe she was so sensitive because graduation was just around the corner.

She raised a pale eyebrow when Jennifer parked in front of a thrift shop. Normally, the petite brunette preferred shopping in small boutiques. "What are we doing here?"

"Didn't I tell you?" Jennifer put on her sunglasses. "The party I'm going to is fifties theme, so think Pink Ladies from *Grease*. Are you sure you don't want to come to the party, Win? I can squeeze in one more person in my car. Who knows, maybe we

can find you a cute boyfriend. Greg was nice and all, but is he really worth mourning for, for over two years?"

Winnie and her former boyfriend, Greg, had broken up during her sophomore year when he had decided to move to Switzerland, and decided he didn't want to do long distance. Although the breakup had been a bit sad, it hadn't been devastating, Winnie privately admitted to herself. Greg, while a nice man, didn't stir up the kind of love or desire she'd craved since she was a teenager.

"I'm not mourning over him." She pulled a green scarf from her purse and draped it around her neck. "I just haven't found anyone." Her response was honest at least. Her English classes had been mainly filled with women and, truthfully, she hadn't been interested in dating after Greg.

"Well, this is your chance to find someone. There will be a bunch of cute boys!"

She smiled as she opened the door for her. "Thank you, but I should really work on my term paper."

"Suit yourself, Win."

The thrift store smelled like old lady perfume, moth balls, and lemon-scented floor cleaner. Even though the store was quite large, it was still painfully cluttered with old furniture, books that hadn't been touched in twenty years, and rows of clothes that had probably belonged to recently deceased grandparents.

A petite older woman walking with a cane, with her hair in a tight bun, greeted them. "Good morning, girls," she said in a raspy voice. "I'm Mrs. Clark. How can I help you today?"

"I'm going to a fifties party, and I'm looking for something in leather instead of a poodle skirt."

The elderly woman frowned, obviously disapproving. "Come along with me, dear, let's see if there is something you like."

While the two women disappeared through the back,



Winnie focused on the books. She soon grew bored when she realized they were cookbooks and books on World War II. Something shiny caught her eye as she went to the glass counter at the back of the store.

Inside the center of the glass counter, was a photograph of a middle-aged woman. The woman's lips were curled up in a devilish smile as if she were trying very hard not to laugh. She was dressed in a stiff, high-collared dress and wearing a large hat. If Winnie had to guess, the picture had probably been taken during the early 1900's.

Around the picture, there were several mementos and little knick-knacks that were in surprisingly good condition. A fan decorated with pearls and thick lace, a hand mirror that had seen better days, a pair of combs with pale blue flowers, a porcelain cat, a figurine which showed two little boys reading on a bench and a worn-out looking family Bible. However, the item that Winnie found most impressive was a cameo brooch.

It was the palest shade of blue she had ever seen and bound by antique gold, in a swirling pattern. The lady on the brooch was delicate-looking, as if it had been carved out of marble, and her hair was in an updo, with curls cascading across her thin shoulders.

"These belong to Hyacinth Carrington." Winnie looked up and saw an older man smiling at her. He was missing two teeth and she guessed he was Mr. Clark. "My grandmother and her were on several charity boards in Wisteria Grove."

"Wisteria Grove?"

"Small town in Virginia." Mr. Clark placed his hands impatiently on his hips before opening the glass counter and pulling out the brooch so Winnie could inspect it further. "Mrs. Carrington donated these pieces to a museum dedicated to the founding families of Wisteria Grove. It has then since closed; those bastards didn't have the decency to return them to her

family. Thankfully, Grandmother was able to save most of the valuable pieces."

Winnie was only half listening to what he was saying. For some reason, she couldn't keep her eyes off the cameo brooch. It was just so beautiful. It was like she had to have it. Almost as if she were its rightful owner, despite how delightfully stupid it sounded.

"How much?" Winnie reached for her wallet. She knew it was an antique, which meant it must be expensive, but she had just gotten paid by the dreaded pizza joint she worked for, and she was never frivolous with money. To spend more than ten dollars on a piece of junk was idiotic, but she—

Mr. Clark closed his hand which he had used to hold the brooch gently, like it was a fragile baby bird. He quickly placed it back inside the glass counter as if he were afraid Winnie would body slam him. "It's not for sale, my dear girl."

"Then why do you display it?"

"I'm proud of it and to show it off to the public; it does not mean it's for sale, young lady."

Before Winnie could tell him she didn't care for his snarky reply, Jennifer came rushing toward them. A few strands of dark hair were stuck to her lip gloss, and she looked near panic. "Mr. Clark, your wife was showing me a few hats when she fell. I need your help. She's not unconscious, but she is in awful pain."

Mr. Clark followed Jennifer, mumbling to himself about how his wife's hip hadn't been the same since her surgery in '09.

Winnie stayed behind, and once she was sure she was alone, she turned her attention back to the beautiful brooch. She wasn't usually like this. Normally, she would have run to Mrs. Clark's rescue or, at the very least, called an ambulance. Everyone who had ever met her for more than five minutes would say she was levelheaded and responsible. Jennifer would probably use the word uptight.

She didn't have much time. If she was going to take the brooch, it was now or never. The worry of whether or not Mr. Clark was going to press charges against her for stealing quickly disappeared when she felt her legs move behind the counter, opening it, and slipping the brooch into her purse.

Winnie pulled out her wallet and deposited a crisp fifty-dollar bill into the antique register that had probably been in use since the eighties. Fifty should be more than enough for a brooch, right?

The blonde was back by the wooden basket aisle, pretending to be interested in a monstrosity when Jennifer joined her. "Mr. Clark says we need to go. He's going to lock up to take Mrs. Clark to the hospital."

"Poor woman." Winnie bit her lip to avoid having her friend hear her sigh of relief at the prospect of not getting caught. "Let's get out of the way."

Later that evening, while Jennifer was at her party with a poorly made costume made of the girls' hand-me-downs, Winnie was dressed in her sweatpants trying to successfully finish her essay.

Her eyes blinked tiredly as she stared at the brooch before pinning it to her sweatshirt. The police weren't knocking on her door, so she guessed she was safe from Mr. Clark's clutches. Her eyes felt tired, and her bones ached. Despite her essay being due in less than two hours, she craved nothing more than sleep.

*Five minutes*, Winnie promised herself as she closed her eyes. *I'll open my eyes in five minutes.*