

If At First You Don't Succeed

Randi raised her hand to the apartment door, paused for a moment and then let it fall. After the way she had treated Wanda yesterday, she felt she at least owed her an apology, but Randi couldn't seem to summon the strength to even knock. If only mother weren't so infuriating with her weekly visits, always coming to check up on Randi, then she might have had a moment to think – think about what she wanted, and not always about what Mother thought was best.

Randi stood wiping her hand on the leg of her jeans before plunging it into her pocket to stop the shaking. She wanted to turn around and run back to the safety of her own apartment, but the part of her stomach that knotted up every time she thought about Wanda's face yesterday told her it was the wrong thing to do, the coward's way out.

The girl had baked her a pie for crissake. Baked her a pie, and she had completely blown her off as soon as Mother showed up – acting like Wanda was just some random neighbor who looked in on the cat from time to time.

Randi pulled her hand from her pocket, wiped it across the leg of her jeans and raised it once again. This time she knocked.

The door opened and there was Wanda. The timid little thing just stood there, her dark mop of hair slightly askew, and staring at the carpet as always. Randi's breath hitched in her throat, the words she had practiced seemed suddenly lost. She stood there staring at the top of Wanda's head while Wanda continued studying that little patch of floor at her feet.

"I – I wanted to apologize," Randi said, absentmindedly rubbing her hand on the leg of her jeans again. "I was rude the other day. And I'm sorry."

Randi plunged her hand into the pocket of her jeans again, this time bringing forth the spare key to her apartment. She thrust the key in Wanda's direction. "I thought maybe I might need someone to look after my cat again sometime. And if you ..."

"I don't think I can look after your cat anymore, Randi. I'm sorry."

The door closed and Randi was left standing alone in the hallway holding her key. The knot in her stomach tightened. Shoulders slumped, she tucked the key back into her pocket and shuffled off toward the stairwell.

Randi thought about her mother as she trudged up the stairs, saw her face, heard her words. *You're gonna to go off to the city and before you know it you'll be one of them bra burning feminist liberals.* That was her mother's

biggest fear, that she'd turn into a bra burning feminist liberal, and that's why she rode the train to visit every Sunday – to check up on Randi and make sure she hadn't done that yet, or worse.

This is ridiculous, Randi thought as she stood in front of her own apartment door. *I can't let my mother dictate my life.* Randi remained there in front of her apartment door, pacing a little circle on the hall carpet as she debated a better way to apologize.

But how? Wanda wasn't exactly a Hallmark card kind of gal, so she'd have to think of something else. *Chocolates? No, it gives the poor girl migraines. Flowers? That won't do, she has a pollen allergy.* Randi stuck her key in the deadbolt and gave it a wicked twist as she banged her head on the door frame in frustration.

In the apartment she flopped on the couch, ready to resign herself to a solitary afternoon of bad TV when she spied the yellow handbill on the coffee table. There was a protest this afternoon at Daley Plaza. Randi smiled and sat up, feeling the knot in her stomach relax. The protest leaflet was better than any Hallmark card, and if she hurried she still had time.

Randi leapt to her feet, rushed into the small bedroom that served double-duty as her home office and began to gather up supplies – poster board and markers and tape. She reached into the closet for the yard sticks she had

been saving for just such an occasion, making sure to pull out two. Jamming the poster board under her arm and everything else into a backpack, she sprinted out the front door of her apartment and bounded up the stairs two at a time.

Randi once again found herself staring at Wanda's door. She took a deep breath, letting it out slowly as she summoned the courage to raise her hand to knock. But before she could, the door flew open while she and Wanda both jumped back, eyes wide and mouths agape.

"I was just ..." Wanda said.

"I thought ..." Randi said. "I'm sorry. Here." She thrust the yellow handbill in Wanda's direction.

The mop-haired girl studied the leaflet for a moment, not saying a word. Randi swallowed hard, afraid that the leaflet would be returned much like the spare key, but then watched the girl's mouth turning up at the corners.

"Is that what the art supplies are for?" Wanda asked.

Randi nodded as Wanda grabbed her hand and tugged her over the threshold.

The two women lay prone upon Wanda's living room floor, propped up on their elbows, each adding her own unique message to a sign. Randi began humming a few of her favorite protest songs as she watched Wanda's fingers

working, and only the buzzing of her mobile dragged her out of her reverie.

She looked at her mother's name on the display, hesitated, but swiped the screen to answer anyway.

“Hi Mom. ... Sorry, not this afternoon. ... What am I doing?” Randi hoisted herself up cross-legged and fixed her gaze on Wanda as a smile slowly crept over her face. “I've got a date, Mom. ... With the crazy cat lady. We're burning our bras down at Daley Plaza.”

Randi watched Wanda clutch a hand to her mouth, but it was too little too late and a small snort escaped the girl's mouth anyway.

“Goodbye Mom,” Randi strained to keep a straight face. “Gotta go before the match singes my fingers.” She dropped her phone to the floor and laid her hand on the back of Wanda's neck. Wanda turned and had just enough time to kiss the inside of Randi's forearm before they both collapsed in a fit of hysterical laughter.