

NEEDLE AND TREAD

Written by

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INT. MARRIOTT HOTEL - DAY

Joyce (65) pleasantly plump yet severe, enters a generic Marriott hotel lobby. Rolling suitcase trailing behind. A sign next to the check-in desk reads: "The Midwestern International 3-Day Quilting Contest Kickoff". Joyce stops and inspects it smugly.

LYNN (62) a dyed blonde woman wearing a hot pink sweatsuit speedwalks over. Joyce doesn't look particularly pleased.

LYNN

Joyce! Long time no see! How's the family?

JOYCE

(cordial)

Lynn. Considering my husband left me and my sister died a few months ago we-

Lynn doesn't hear or doesn't care. She just rushes in to her next thought.

LYNN

Well, we're all just fine. Earl bought a riding lawnmower the other week so of course that's been a real adventure.

They are joined by SHAUNA (50s) stick-thin, bun, cardigan.

SHAUNA

Joyce! Darling! Fancy seeing you here! I thought you were taking a break from competitions because of...

(whispering)

because of Candace?

JOYCE

I miss one show to attend my sister's funeral and I'm on a break? You wish.

Shauna laughs and shakes her head. She side-hugs Joyce and catches up to a few other ladies, one young with dark hair and combat boots, RACHAEL (24). Joyce looks after them. Lynn sticks with Joyce.

JOYCE (CONT'D)

Who's that?

Lynn looks over.

LYNN  
That's Rachael McPhee!

Joyce doesn't respond.

LYNN (CONT'D)  
Rising star? Made a big splash at  
the Northern Southeast American  
sectionals?

Joyce stays silent as Rachael walks away.

LYNN (CONT'D)  
Don't worry. She's still got a lot  
to learn.

Finally Joyce looks back at Lynn.

JOYCE  
I'm this close to 50 ribbons. I'm  
not worried.

INT. BALLROOM - CONTINUOUS

They enter a hotel ballroom, cheaply decorated for a banquet.  
A slideshow of various quilts plays at the front.

Joyce sits down at an empty table, pulls out a worn  
sketchbook, starts writing. Lynn sits next to her, still  
chattering away. A few moments pass.

LYNN  
Oh! Isn't that one of your pieces?

Joyce glances up. Lynn points at a quilt on the slideshow  
portraying Washington Crossing the Delaware.

LYNN (CONT'D)  
It's absolutely lovely, Joyce!

Joyce is clearly satisfied.

LYNN (CONT'D)  
And look, so many people are  
talking about your work!

Joyce does look. People all across the room are chatting and  
pointing at the slideshow. She returns to her sketch.

LYNN (CONT'D)  
That one really is something, isn't  
it?

Joyce's grins, still thinking Lynn is talking about her.

LYNN (CONT'D)

Must be one of Rachael's...

Joyce's smile drops. She follows Lynn's gaze. The slideshow has changed. On this slide, Van Gogh's *Starry Night*, in striking, expressive detail. Someone whistles. Others applaud. Joyce's brow furrows.

JOYCE

What's that?

LYNN

Oh right! You were gone for the Mid-central Central City Show! Rachael won first place. She's only 24, too.

Joyce glances around the room, gauging everyone's reactions. She looks at the page she's been scribbling on, which reads "Plan of Attack for 50th Ribbon" in ornate lettering.

Joyce storms out of the ballroom. Lynn barely notices.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Joyce sits in a modest hotel room wearing a nightie and curlers. Pencil in hand, sketch apparently just completed. A layered mountain landscape with a geometric sky.

A picture of a younger Joyce and another middle-aged woman with similar features sits on the bed beside her.

In the photo, Joyce wears a red ribbon, the woman a blue. Joyce brushes it softly. Flips it over. In faded cursive: "Joyce and Candace's First Ribbons!" Joyce tucks it back into her notebook. Turns out the light.

INT. DINING ROOM - MORNING

Joyce pours herself a bowl of Raisin Bran. She starts walking to a table when-

WHAM

RACHAEL, dressed in black fishnets and combat boots, walks right into Joyce, causing her to drop her bowl.

JOYCE

Hey!

Rachael turns around, revealing a ripped Metallica crop top. She sees Joyce. Eyes widen. She speeds out of the room.

Joyce is stunned, but lets her go. She talks aloud.

JOYCE (CONT'D)

The nerve. Can't say I'm surprised  
with that getup-

She looks beside her, as if to share the moment with someone. But no one's there. She bashfully cleans up the spilled cereal.

INT. BALLROOM - MORNING

The ballroom has been converted to a quilter's mecca, supplied with state-of-the-art sewing stations where others have already begun their work. Joyce betrays a hint of excitement and sits down.

Rachael walks in and sits at a station near Joyce's.

INT. BALLROOM - AFTERNOON

Joyce toils away on her quilt. Countless fabric triangles form a gray mountain on her table. Shauna approaches her.

SHAUNA

Joyce!

Joyce looks up, but her gaze is immediately diverted by Rachael walking to her station. Shauna also looks over.

SHAUNA (CONT'D)

The McPhee girl! Y'know, she really  
showed everyone up at Central City.  
Haven't seen a talent like her in  
years.

JOYCE

Is that right?

SHAUNA

Not since you!

Joyce cocks an eyebrow, as if deciding how to react. She keeps her eyes on the younger woman beginning her work.

SHAUNA (CONT'D)

Harriet even complimented her. And  
you know how she is. Called you  
bitter, the hag.

(MORE)

SHAUNA (CONT'D)

I defended you- I mean, who  
wouldn't be after everything you've  
been-

Shauna's words fade away as Joyce watches Rachael sew together the array of orange and pink fabric sprawled across her station with a calculated precision.

Joyce's expression hardens.

SHAUNA (CONT'D)

Anywho! There's no need to worry  
about some... spunky teenybopper.

Lost in thought, a plan seemingly forming, Joyce walks out.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Joyce wakes up to an alarm at 1:30 am. She grabs her purse from her bedside table. Quietly leaves the room.

INT. OUTSIDE OF BALLROOM - NIGHT

Joyce glares into the lock and carefully selects two needles from her purse. She picks the lock and pushes her way in.

INT. INSIDE OF BALLROOM - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Joyce beelines to Rachael's station and finds a folded quilt. She unfurls it into full view. An impossibly complex, surreal desert landscape. Intricate. Gorgeous.

A beat.

Joyce pulls something from her purse. She stares at the SEAM RIPPER for more than a moment. Hardens. RIPS a few of the quilt seams. Joyce gingerly returns the piece and creeps away.

INT. BALLROOM - MORNING

Joyce anxiously taps her heels on the ground at her sewing station. Her plans are spread before her, the photo of her sister is propped up, but she isn't working. She keeps her eyes trained on the entrance.

Rachael walks in. Joyce first averts her eyes, but soon can't resist. She watches Rachael sit at her own station and unfold her quilt. HOLES are visible from across the room.

Rachael dissolves into tears as Joyce's expression turns from haughty to horrified.

Rachael begins to gather her emotions and her sewing supplies, clearly planning to finish the quilt anyway. Joyce notices the photo on her desk and flips it over, ashamed.

MONTAGE - INT. BALLROOM - MORNING/AFTERNOON

A) Rachael examines her quilt edges.

B) Joyce threads a needle, glances at Rachael, and accidentally pricks her finger.

C) Rachael pins and sews her quilt.

D) Joyce sews the backing on her quilt. Noticing a crooked line, she grabs her seam ripper. She pauses, looking guilty.

- Loudspeaker announces "1 HOUR LEFT OF THE QUILTING STAGE".

F) Rachael irons, folds, and ties her quilt up in a bow.

G) Joyce irons, folds, and ties her quilt up in a bow.

H) Rachael and Joyce place their quilts on the finished table.

INT. OUTSIDE OF BALLROOM - AFTERNOON

Joyce lingers at the ballroom door. Rachael walks up behind her and taps her on the shoulder.

JOYCE

AH! What? What do you want?

RACHAEL

Oh sorry! I just, uh, Joyce, right?  
Joyce Henderson?

JOYCE

Yes?

RACHAEL

I'm... sorry about yesterday. I sort of panicked. I really wanted to meet you at the last show, but well... I heard... about your sister. I'm so sorry. I can't imagine the pain you've been going through.

Rachael looks up at a silent Joyce. She continues, staring at the ground.

RACHAEL (CONT'D)  
 You know... I've looked up to you  
 for so many years now and-

A beat.

RACHAEL (CONT'D)  
 Anyway, that's all wanted to say.  
 You're an inspiration to me.

Rachael momentarily searches Joyce's impassive face. She nods, anxiously walks away. Joyce continues to stand there. Silent.

INT. BALLROOM - EVENING

A row of contestants, including Rachael and Joyce, sit with their quilts displayed behind a podium manned by an emcee.

EMCEE  
 And no surprise here! This woman  
 has been on the circuit longer than  
 anybody. You know her! You love  
 her!

Joyce looks positively sick.

EMCEE (CONT'D)  
 Earning a hi-stor-ic 50th ribbon!  
 It's Joy-

JOYCE  
 (abruptly standing up)  
 STOP!

EMCEE  
 My my! Excuse me everybody! Looks  
 like we've got a geriatric emergen-

Joyce, pushing the emcee away, speaks loudly into the mic.

JOYCE  
 I cheated. I sabotaged a better  
 quilter's work. I- I can't accept  
 this award.

Joyce tears down her quilt and runs out. Everyone in the room is stunned, Rachael especially.



EXT. MARRIOTT HOTEL - EVENING

Joyce stands outside with her suitcase. Rachael walks out with her own luggage, a white third place ribbon pinned to her denim jacket. She sees Joyce and walks over.

RACHAEL  
You waiting for a shuttle, too?

JOYCE  
Your quilt was beautiful.

Rachael doesn't speak. She focuses on a tar spot on the concrete, begins toeing it with her boot.

JOYCE (CONT'D)  
I hope you know I regret what I did-

RACHAEL  
Yeah. I- I know.

JOYCE  
My sister, she sort of... tempered  
my worst instincts.

RACHAEL  
(looking up)  
I wish I'd gotten to meet her. I  
admired- admire- you both. The  
Henderson sisters.

JOYCE  
I think Candace would've liked you.  
(smiling)  
She always knew better than me.

A beat.

JOYCE (CONT'D)  
I ruined everything.

RACHAEL  
Quilting isn't everything, Joyce.

Rachael looks away. Silence lingers. Finally Rachael looks up, then at the stolid Joyce.

RACHAEL (CONT'D)  
You going somewhere?

JOYCE  
Nowhere particular.

Rachael takes a deep breath, considering.

RACHAEL

Want to get some dinner? It'd be  
kind of nice to bounce around a few  
ideas.

Joyce hesitates. But she lets herself smile, just a bit.

JOYCE

Of course.

Together, they walk to the curb. Joyce glances at Rachael.

JOYCE (CONT'D)

I'm paying.

RACHAEL

I know.

**THE END**