

ALMOST BY DESIGN

Written by

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Based on the shorts by Roberta M Roy

Almost By Design

Just No Beyond

INT. MAXIM'S INTERIOR DESIGN - WORK AREA - DAY

Desks awash with drawings of classroom layouts.

INSERT - COMPUTER-AIDED DESIGN SCREEN

Classroom furniture in various colors.

BACK

Computer stylus in hand, ALYSSA LANG (20s) daydreams.

CARLIE (20s), Alyssa's stylish best friend, crosses to her.

CARLIE
'Morning, Alyssa.

Alyssa startles back to the here-and-now.

ALYSSA
Good morning, Carlie.
(laughs)
Caught me.

CARLIE
Any daydream in particular?

Alyssa twists to face Carlie. Her brow furrows.

ALYSSA
Just... my future.

Carlie plops next to Alyssa.

CARLIE
And?

ALYSSA
In school, I saw myself designing
large, climate-aware private
residences.

CARLIE
Climate aware? Like how?

ALYSSA
Plastic free. Energy efficient.
Water saving devices like smart
sprinklers and faucet aerators.

CARLIE
That's what interests you?

ALYSSA

It's a challenge to reduce carbon impact by redesigning cubicles, walls and ceiling panels with current materials.

CARLIE

Like wallboard and paneling?

ALYSSA

That, but what I would really enjoy is coaching on the importance of reclaiming used furniture.

Carlie beams a knowing smile and nods.

CARLIE

You're old, love. I see where you're going: antiques.

ALYSSA

Imagine combing estate sales. Bidding at Sotheby's. Christies!

CARLIE

But Maxim's designs for schools. You knew that.

ALYSSA

With all the college loan debt I was carrying, I went for the money. Maxim's offered the most, and I could live with my family.

Carlie takes Alyssa's hand.

CARLIE

Sorry you're unhappy, Alyssa. Is there anything I can do to help?

ALYSSA

Being my friend is a huge help. It'll work out.

INT. LANG FAMILY HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Alyssa and her mother, FRAN (50s), prepare dinner.

ALYSSA

I told Felix about the limits of desks and chairs in circles, lines and semicircles. He understands.

FRAN

Not enough variety, eh?

ALYSSA

The feel of upholstery. The swerve of drapes on windows. Carpet with different styles, thicknesses and colors. Translating a homeowner's vision into pleasing reality.

FRAN

Color schemes. Shades. Placements.

ALYSSA

You get it.

FRAN

There's an interior design firm that would love to have you. Hopefully, close to us.

ALYSSA

I check every day. There are none. Felix and I see it as a problem.

(a thought)

When I checked the classifieds today, I did see a story about Iowa ranked first in the Nation for wind power.

FRAN

Hooray for Iowa. My little environmentalist.

ALYSSA

They can't move fast enough to get rid of the pollution coal-fired power plants spew.

FRAN

It would certainly slow climate change.

ALYSSA

This spring, it's been thunderstorm after thunderstorm. I've never seen anything like it.

FRAN

Weatherman said 50 in three months.

ALYSSA

We need to be greener.

INT. SMALL CAFE - DAY

Alyssa and Carlie lunch together.

ALYSSA
I'd like to design large homes.

CARLIE
Lots of them in the suburbs.

ALYSSA
More in the center of things.

CARLIE
What does "In the center of things"
mean?

ALYSSA
Chicago. San Francisco. New York.

Carlie taken aback.

CARLIE
Really? Leave Iowa and Felix?

ALYSSA
Probably not Chicago. Illinois is
not a great state for climate
conservation. California is second
only to Arizona in air pollution.
New York is one of the top ten
greenest states in the nation.

CARLIE
Then you're thinking New York?

ALYSSA
Probably.

CARLIE
The city?

ALYSSA
New York, New York. But if I were
to move, would Felix come with me?

INT. MAXIM'S INTERIOR DESIGN - WORK AREA - DAY

Stylus in hand, Alyssa on phone call.

INSERT - COMPUTER AIDED DESIGN SCREEN

A rendition of a luxurious room with plush furnishings. The New York City night skyline sparkles outside bay windows.

BACK

ALYSSA

You serve families of means all over the city but primarily the Upper East Side?

(listens)

Bachelors in Interior Design from the University of Iowa, and a year at Maxim's. They've been wonderful. I've learned space planning, lighting design, materials and systems.

(listens)

I never considered how much a school board president or principal impacts a school design. In talking with them, I learned to consider and respond to concerns.

(pause)

Thank you. Talk to you soon.

INT. LANG FAMILY HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Alyssa and Fran over coffee.

FRAN

Maxim's will recommend you?

ALYSSA

I told them the staff, camaraderie and support has been wonderful.

FRAN

And they accepted it.

ALYSSA

They asked if there was anything to encourage me to stay. Like a raise. I told them they're very generous but it's not the money.

FRAN

What then?

ALYSSA

The need to follow a different path: communicate with homeowners about needs and preferences and how to satisfy them. Design that involves a range - couches, hassocks, window dressings, color.

FRAN

They're okay with that?

ALYSSA

They said, "One must follow one's heart."

An air of sadness around them, Alyssa and Fran hold hands.

ALYSSA

Mom, don't fret. If I get the job, I'll be fine. I scoped out the area. It's safer and greener than here. Felix is open to joining me and thinks he might follow me.

She has an empathetic look for her mom's long face.

FRAN

We'll miss you. I'll miss you. Who's going to be my cooking buddy? My source of fun stories.

ALYSSA

I'll be home for holidays. You and dad or bro can come to visit me, too, right?

Alyssa pulls her mom into a hug.

INT. SMALL CAFE - DAY

Alyssa and Carlie at lunch.

ALYSSA

Felix supports my dream but he's still not sure what he's going to do but he's considering it.

CARLIE

Where will you live?

ALYSSA

I'm looking for a roommate to share an apartment on the Upper East Side.

CARLIE

Think you'll find one?

ALYSSA

The question is rent. About \$2000. I could handle that if I share it.

CARLIE

Isn't New York dangerous?

ALYSSA

One of the top 14 safest cities in the world.

CARLIE

I didn't know that. Bad rep, I guess.

Alyssa LAUGHS.

ALYSSA

The Upper East Side is much safer than other neighborhoods. And I won't need a car.

CARLIE

(laughs)

No car, no parking tickets.

ALYSSA

The Upper East Side is near the Museum Mile and Philharmonic.

(chuckles)

A real plus as Felix bait.

CARLIE

The perfect place for music and art lovers.

ALYSSA

The Met's there, too.

INT. MAXIM'S INTERIOR DESIGN - WORK AREA - DAY

Alyssa and Carlie together. Alyssa opens an email and her face lights up.

ALYSSA

I can't believe it. They offered me a Junior Designer position at a salary that makes it possible to afford my own place.

CARLIE

Fantastic.

No stopping jubilant Alyssa. She holds Carlie's hands and dances her around in a circle.

ALYSSA

Can't wait to tell Felix.

INT. LANG FAMILY HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Alyssa and Fran share post-dinner cleanup chores.

ALYSSA

It's likely I'll hire contractors and vendors to carry out designs.

FRAN

Painters and carpenters?

ALYSSA

Plumbers, electricians. Artists.

FRAN

Sounds complicated.

ALYSSA

That's why I love it.

FRAN

You've always been up for a challenge, and love shopping.

ALYSSA

Working with the clients will be the most fun. Also, shopping, negotiating, calculating and the balance.

FRAN

Balance?

ALYSSA

Between my tastes and the client's. Budgeting construction costs. Can't wait.

FRAN
It's almost by design.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT./EXT. IOWA - HIGHWAY - FELIX'S CAR, MOVING - DAY

Alyssa and boyfriend FELIX RAMIREZ(20s) cruise down a highway. Alyssa drives.

FELIX
Trying to adjust to the fact that you're leaving, Lys.

ALYSSA
You know I gotta go, Felix.

FELIX
Sure. What's happening with the apartment search?

ALYSSA
Going great! A coworker is getting married. Her lease is up in two months. In the meantime, I'll room with her.

FELIX
What then?

ALYSSA
I hope to find a housemate then just assume the lease.

FELIX
Nice. You also have options in case something better comes along.

ALYSSA
How about you? Been looking? Still interested?

FELIX
Yeah. Like the thought of returning to New York and being close to you.

ALYSSA
Does it depend on finding work?

FELIX

Actually, no. My cousin says I'm welcome to stay with him and his family for a while.

ALYSSA

That's a plus.

FELIX

Makes the job search easier. And gives me time to search out digs.

INT. LANG FAMILY HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Alyssa opens a box as Fran looks on.

ALYSSA

Felix says he's moving, too.

FRAN

Are you going to live together?

ALYSSA

It's too early in our relationship for that.

Alyssa lifts a glass bottle with a stopper from a box, admires it.

FRAN

For me?

She digs out a second bottle and hands both to her mother.

ALYSSA

For you!

FRAN

To take to work?

Alyssa nods yes.

ALYSSA

All you need now is a pitcher with a water filter.

Fran shoots a disbelieving look at Alyssa.

FRAN

I need a pitcher with a water filter?

Alyssa turns back to Fran.

ALYSSA

Yes, Mom. No more plastic bottles.

FRAN

But they're convenient.

ALYSSA

And they are conveniently full of nanoplastics that invade the air we breath, the food we eat, the water we drink -- especially in plastic bottles.

FRAN

Really?

ALYSSA

The thinner the plastic bottle, the more plastic it releases.

FRAN

Using glass and filtered water means no nanoplastics?

ALYSSA

Fewer. Even filtered tap water has nano plastics in it. But, hey, at least we're no longer using any of those carcinogenic black plastics.

FRAN

So we give up plastic bottles?

ALYSSA

There's no getting beyond nanoplastics now. Sorry, Mom.

INT. NEW YORK CITY - ALYSSA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

A small two bedroom.

Alyssa directs Two Movers who deliver her belongings.

Felix hangs in the background.

ALYSSA

Could you bring them into this bedroom, please.

The men slide a box spring and mattress into the bedroom.

ALYSSA

Thank you, so much.

The Mover's job done, Alyssa signs for the delivery and ushers them out.

ALYSSA
Officially furnished.

Felix takes Alyssa's hand, pulls her toward the bedroom. On the way, he picks up a shopping bag.

FELIX
Whattaya say, we break out these new sheets?

ALYSSA MAY
(laughs)
And break'em in.

INT. NEW YORK CITY - ALYSSA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Alyssa strokes an antique couch and matching coffee table.

FELIX
(re: furnishings)
New, eh. Well, so to speak. Nice.

ALYSSA
Picked them up at a second hand store at a price so low I couldn't believe it.

Felix plops on the couch.

FELIX
Comfortable.

ALYSSA
Seller said people prefer new cloth-covered furniture. He was happy to get rid of them.

Felix pats the seat. Alyssa joins him.

FELIX
(laughs)
And you're happy to make him happy.

ALYSSA
Oh, Felix. I love them. Wish he had a chair to go with them.
(then)
Not that I could have afforded it.

FELIX

Have you heard from your roommate-to-be?

ALYSSA

Gianna arrives from New Jersey this weekend with her own furniture -- chairs and other stuff.

FELIX

Is she also interested in saving the environment?

ALYSSA

Why do you ask?

FELIX

Wondering if the chair will match this couch?

Alyssa shrugs her shoulders: don't know.

ALYSSA

Any luck with the job hunt?

FELIX

Nothing in hotel management. There are a few front desk positions I'm applying for.

ALYSSA

You're going to have to find something, right? You can't live with your cousin forever.

FELIX

Even with a job, it'll take me a bit to scrounge up security for an apartment.

ALYSSA

Gianna has dishes, silverware, pots and pans. Her father and his friend are helping her move.

FELIX

Hope she can cook. Can't have me around to do it all the time.

Alyssa cuddles close to Felix, laughs.

ALYSSA

Let's hope she can't.

INT. NEW YORK CITY - ALYSSA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

GIANNA LEONETTI (30s) arrives with FATHER (70s) and a NEIGHBOR (60s).

They all speak with a North New Jersey spin.

GIANNA

Hello, Alyssa. I'm Gianna. This is my dad and our neighbor.

Alyssa reaches out her hand to each and they all shake.

ALYSSA

Nice to meet you. Gianna's room is this way.

She give Gianna a 50 cent tour of the apartment.

LIVING ROOM

ALYSSA

The living room. Like my new couch and coffee table?

GIANNA

Nice. My furniture is modern and simple.

KITCHEN

ALYSSA

And this is the kitchen.

GIANNA

Nice window.

Gianna's Father and Neighbor deliver a modern chair and ottoman. Gianna gestures where to place them.

LATER

The apartment now mixes vintage and modern furnishings.

Felix enters and gifts Alyssa three pots.

ALYSSA

Oh, Felix. They're perfect.

Alyssa gives Felix a little hug but when she pulls away he reaches to return it. Disappointment tracks on Felix' face.

Alyssa shakes three packages of seeds for Felix.

FELIX
Parsley. What are the others?

She prepares to plant the seeds.

ALYSSA
Basil and oregano.

FELIX
Bonito. How would you like me to
prepare chicken? Pollo con tomate?
Pollo ai ajillo?

ALYSSA
What was the second one?

FELIX
Ajillo? Garlic.

ALYSSA
I have to buy some. But, yes. I'd
like to try it. Just write out the
list of things I need to pick up.

FELIX
I can do that.

ALYSSA
When will you cook? Tomorrow night?
Or maybe wait until the weekend?

FELIX
Tomorrow night'd be fine.

A KNOCK.

Alyssa opens the door to PIPER MURPHY (20S) who carries a
small pot and bags of seeds.

ALYSSA
Piper. Come in. Come in. Just in
time to meet Felix. Felix, this is
Piper Murphy. We work together so I
invited her over for tea and to
keep me company while I'm planting.

Felix shakes Piper's hand.

FELIX
Nice to meet you.

Piper speaks with an Irish lilt.

PIPER

Nice to meet you, Felix. Alyssa has told me what a great cook you are.

KITCHEN

Piper sets the pot and the seeds on the kitchen counter and hangs her bag over the back of chair.

ALYSSA

I'm counting on him to prepare meals.

(pokes Felix' ribs)

He's between jobs.

FELIX

Come on, Alyssa. Not easy to find a position in hotel management.

Alyssa hugs Felix.

FELIX

Any time, any day. Like tomorrow night?

Alyssa's focuses on Piper.

ALYSSA

Oh, Piper, how nice of you to bring something to plant. Mint?

Felix notes ingredients on a pad.

PIPER

When you told me you were going to plant cooking herbs, I thought maybe mint for cool drinks.

Felix leaves the pad on the counter and watches as Alyssa and Piper plant the herbs and place them on the windowsill.

PIPER

The living room is very eclectic.

ALYSSA

Gianna has definite ideas about interior decorating.

PIPER

I see that.

INT. NEW YORK CITY - ALYSSA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

After a meatless Monday meal, Alyssa, Felix, and Piper clean.

PIPER

You can heat this Pyrex bowl and lid in the microwave?

ALYSSA

Or in the oven. They handle high temperatures well.

Piper puts the lid on one she holds up to consider.

PIPER

I like them. Maybe I'll get a few.

FELIX

They double the impact of meatless Monday.

PIPER

What do you mean?

FELIX

Alyssa would like us to not only eat less meat, but eat less nanoplastics.

Alyssa opens the refrigerator door.

PIPER

Oh, I see.

FELIX

Pyrex, no?

Gianna arrives late. Typical for meatless Mondays.

GIANNA

Sorry to be so late. Had to pick up stuff for supper.

ALYSSA

We'll leave you to it.

Piper, Alyssa, and Felix head for the living room.

Gianna prepares a steak dinner with veggies in plastic bags.

INT. NEW YORK CITY - ALYSSA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Alyssa shows Piper vintage 1920's flappers' style dresses.

PIPER

Are they originals? I mean more
than a hundred years old?

Just as Alyssa nods in confirmation, Gianna walks from her
bedroom to the kitchen.

GIANNA

You buy things second hand?

PIPER

Deadly!
(holds the dress up)
I really like it.

Gianna passes through and catches sight of the dresses.

GIANNA

Not bad.
(moves on)
Just not my style.

Piper and Alyssa shrug their shoulders.

ALYSSA

Piper, did I tell you? Gianna loves
the idea of fresh herbs to use with
our meals.

PIPER

So it's all set to enjoy the
meatless Monday meal Felix is going
to prepare?

ALYSSA

Arroz y frijoles españoles...
Spanish rice and beans.

GIANNA (O.S.)

Alyssa, I forgot to tell you I was
invited to dinner at a steakhouse
Monday night.

Dressed for an evening out, Gianna crosses the living room to
leave. She waves.

GIANNA

So I guess you can count me out.
See you after dinner.

Piper and Alyssa shrug and laugh.

INT. NEW YORK CITY - ALYSSA'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Felix preps vegan Spanish Rice and Beans. Alyssa helps.

FELIX

Gracias, mi amor. Too bad Gianna isn't joining us. I think she'd like Matteo.

KNOCK.

At the door, Alyssa lets in MATTEO GARCIA (30s).

MATTEO

Buenas noches. I'm Matteo. Matteo Garcia. You were expecting me.

ALYSSA

Welcome, Matteo. Felix told me all about you and what a good friend you are to him.

Felix joins them, shakes Matteo's hand and pulls him to the --

KITCHEN

FELIX

Just in time to add the frijoles rojos.
(offers a glass)
Vino?

MATTEO

(laughs)
Si, claro.

They toast.

FELIX

Salud.

MATTEO

Salud.

ALYSSA

Felix is fixing Spanish rice with beans. Do you like them?

MATTEO

Definitely.

LATER

The meal ended, Matteo, Piper, Alyssa and Felix chat.

Gianna enters. Felix and Matteo rise to greet her.

FELIX
Gianna, this is my good friend
Matteo.

Gianna eyes him with interest and extends her hand.

GIANNA
Pleased to meet you.

They shake hands.

ALYSSA
Would you like to join us, Gianna?
A glass of wine?

Gianna sits across from Matteo.

GIANNA
Matteo. I like that name.

MATTEO
Gracias. I'm an old friend of Felix
from when he was a hotel manager at
the Luxe. Before he decided to
travel the world.
(laughs)
If you can call Iowa the world.

ALYSSA
It was certainly my world for a
long time. Matteo, Gianna's from
across the Hudson in New Jersey.

MATTEO
I love New Jersey, Gianna. Is that
where you grew up?

GIANNA
My dad owns restaurants all over
the state. But me, I thought I'd
shoot for the big time in New York.

MATTEO
That's great. Bueno!

Gianna reaches out her hand to Matteo.

GIANNA
A pleasure!

LIVING ROOM - LATER

Felix asleep in front of the TV.

In robe and pajamas, Gianna wanders into the --

KITCHEN

where Alyssa washes the dishes.

ALYSSA

Glad you got the chance to meet Matteo. Good looking guy, huh?

GIANNA

Will he be coming again next Monday?

ALYSSA

We could ask him. Interested?

GIANNA

Might be.

ALYSSA

It would be meatless. Still interested?

GIANNA

Why not?

INT. NEW YORK CITY - ALYSSA'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - DAY

Felix and Matteo install a low-flow shower head.

Gianna looks on from the doorway.

GIANNA

Being tall is a gift. Nice you can reach it so easily, Matteo.

Matteo climbs out of the tub, turns on the shower and holds his hand under it.

FELIX

This will save on water, thanks to your super plumbing skills. Matteo should be the first one to try it.

GIANNA

So now you're going to shower here.
(laughs)
I get it, Felix.

FELIX
What do you think?

MATTEO
Good for the environment.

Alyssa enters to inspect.

Felix puts his hand around her waist.

FELIX
Just as you wanted, mi amor.

ALYSSA
Oh, Matteo. Thank you so much. It's
so much better.

GIANNA
I'll miss the force of the old one,
but did you know Felix likes it so
much, he'd like to try it out.

Gianna and Matteo exchange looks.

Felix squeezes Alyssa.

INT. NEW YORK CITY - ALYSSA'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

Gianna eats breakfast as messily dressed Felix wanders from
Alyssa's bedroom to the bathroom.

Alyssa wanders out, grabs coffee and joins Gianna.

GIANNA
I see you're not alone.

ALYSSA
We got in late last night, and
we're going to the farmer's market
first thing. We decided it best if
Felix slept over.

Felix leaves the bathroom all put together. He smiles.

FELIX
Gianna. You really should try one
of the new bamboo toothbrushes.
They're just great and environment
friendly.

GIANNA
Plastic is fine with me.

ALYSSA
You prefer the plastic one?

GIANNA
I like the color: red and gold.

Felix pours coffee and joins them at the table.

ALYSSA
Gianna, Piper is coming over to
joins us at the farmer's market.
Want to come?

GIANNA
It's such a nice day. I'd like
that.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - OPEN AIR MARKET - DAY

In high heels, Gianna finds her footing difficult.

Alyssa and Felix hold hands.

Piper walks near but charts her own course.

Gianna buys grapes then approaches Alyssa and Felix.

GIANNA
My feet are killing me. I'll wait
for you on that bench.

ALYSSA
You'll be okay by yourself?

GIANNA
I'll be fine. See you in a bit.

Piper talks with an Older Woman at a vegetable stand. She
selects an assortment the Woman bags.

She waves to the Woman.

PIPER
Thank you so much. Nice talking to
you.

Piper meets up with Alyssa and Felix.

PIPER
Guess what I'm making for meatless
Monday? Vegetarian Irish stew!

FELIX

What? I'm out of a job?

PIPER

The woman who runs the stand used to run one at the The Milk Market in Limerick. In Ireland. I asked for a suggestion for a vegetarian dish. Silly me. Of course. Irish stew!

FELIX

Sounds interesting.

PIPER

I've got all the ingredients except lentils.

ALYSSA

You've made it before?

PIPER

No. But my mom made it all the time. The vendor reminded me. So, what do say? Vegetarian Irish stew?

Felix turns his lips down in a pout.

FELIX

If Matteo and I are also welcome.

PIPER

Of course you're both welcome.

ALYSSA

Wait 'til I tell Gianna. Wonder what she'll say.

PIPER

I think that as long as you invite Matteo, she'll be there and loving it. The menu doesn't matter.

They laugh and join up with Gianna who puts on her shoes for the trip home.

THE END