

Chapter 33

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I have Sunday off, so I spend the day out of the house. It's a beautiful summer day—not too hot and not too cool—so I drive over to the local park and sit on a bench and read my book. When you're in prison, you forget those simple pleasures. Just going outside and reading at the park. Sometimes you want it so bad, it's physically painful.

I'm never going back there. Never.

I grab a bite to eat at a fast-food drive-through, then I drive back to the house. The Winchester estate is really beautiful. Even though I'm starting to despise Nina, I can't hate that house. It's a beautiful house.

I park on the street like always and walk up to the front door of the house. The sky has been darkening during my entire drive home, and just as I get to the door, the clouds break open and droplets of rain cascade out of the sky. I wrench the door open and slip inside before I get drenched.

When I get into the living room, Nina is sitting on the sofa in semi-darkness. She's not doing anything there. She's not reading, she's not watching TV. She's just sitting there. And when I open the door, her eyes snap to attention.

"Nina?" I say. "Everything okay?"

"Not really." She glances over at the other end of the sofa, and now I notice she's got a stack of clothing next to her. It's the same clothing that she insisted I take from her when I first started working here. "What is my clothing doing in your room?"

I stare at her as a flash of lightning brightens the room. “What? What are you talking about? You gave me those clothes.”

“I gave them to you!” She lets out a barking laugh that echoes through the room, only partially drowned out by the crack of thunder. “Why would I give my maid clothing worth thousands of dollars?”

“You”—my legs tremble beneath me—“you said they were too small on you. You insisted that I take them.”

“How could you lie like that?” She takes a step toward me, her blue eyes like ice. “You stole my clothing! You’re a thief!”

“No...” I reach out for something before my legs give out under me. But I grasp only air. “I would never do that.”

“Ha!” She snorts. “That’s what I get for trusting a convict to work in my home!”

She’s loud enough that Andrew hears the commotion. He dashes out of his office and I see his handsome face at the top of the stairs, lit by another bolt of lightning. Oh God, what is he going to think of me? It’s bad enough that he knows about my prison record. I don’t want him to think I stole from his own house.

“Nina?” He takes the stairs down two at a time. “What’s going on here?”

“I’ll tell you what’s going on!” she announces triumphantly. “Millie here has been stealing from my closet. She stole all this clothing from me. I found it in her closet.”

Andrew’s eyes slowly grow wide. “She...”

“I didn’t steal anything!” Tears prick at my eyes. “I swear to you. Nina gave me those clothes. She said they didn’t fit her.”

“As if we would believe your lies.” She sneers at me. “I should call the police on you. Do you know what this clothing is worth?”

“No, please don’t...”

“Oh, right.” Nina laughs at the expression on my face. “You’re on parole, aren’t you? Something like this would send you right back to prison.”

Andrew is looking down at the clothing on the couch, a deep crease between his eyebrows. “Nina...”

“I’m going to call them.” Nina whips her phone out of her purse. “God knows what else she stole from us, right, Andy?”

“Nina.” He lifts his eyes from the stack of clothing. “Millie didn’t steal this clothing. I remember you emptying your closet. You put it all in trash bags and said you were donating it.” He picks up a tiny white dress. “You haven’t been able to fit into this in years.”

It’s gratifying the way Nina’s cheeks turn pink. “What are you saying? That I’m too fat?”

He ignores her remark. “I’m saying there’s no way she stole this from you. Why are you doing this to her?”

Her mouth falls open. “Andy...”

Andrew looks over at me, hovering by the sofa. “Millie.” His voice is gentle when he says my name. “Would you go upstairs and give us some privacy? I need to talk to Nina.”

“Yes, of course,” I agree. Gladly.

The two of them stand there in silence while I mount the flight of stairs to the second floor. When I reach the top, I go over to the doorway to the attic and I open the door. For a moment, I stand there, contemplating my next move. Then I close the door without going through.

Much quieter this time, I creep over to the head of the stairs. I stand at the edge of the hallway, just before the stairwell. I can't see Nina and Andrew, but I can hear their voices. It's wrong to eavesdrop, but I can't help myself. After all, this conversation will almost certainly involve Nina's accusations about me.

I hope Andrew continues to defend me, even when I'm out of the room. Will she convince him that I stole her clothes? I am, after all, a convict. You make one mistake in life, and nobody ever trusts you again.



"... didn't take these dresses," Andrew is saying. "I know she didn't."

"How could you take her side over mine?" Nina shoots back. "The girl was in prison. You can't trust somebody like that. She's a liar and a thief, and she probably deserves to be back in prison."

"How could you say something like that? Millie has been wonderful."

"Yes, I'm sure you think so."

"When did you become so cruel, Nina?" His voice trembles. "You've changed. You're a different person now."

"Everyone changes," she spits at him.

"No." His voice lowers so that I have to strain to hear it over the sound of raindrops falling outside and hitting the pavement. "Not like you. I don't even recognize you anymore. You're not the same person I fell in love with."

There's a long silence, broken by a bolt of thunder that cracks loud enough to shake the foundations of the house. Once it's faded, I hear Nina's next words loud and clear.

"What are you saying, Andy?"

"I'm saying... I don't think I'm in love with you anymore, Nina. I think we should separate."

“You’re not in love with me anymore?” she bursts out. “How can you say that?”

“I’m sorry. I was just going along with things, living our lives, and I didn’t even realize how unhappy I was.”

Nina is quiet for a long time as she absorbs his words. “Does this have to do with Millie?”

I hold my breath waiting to hear his answer. There was something between us that night in New York, but I’m not going to kid myself that he’s leaving Nina because of me.

“This isn’t about Millie,” he finally says.

“Really? So are you going to lie to my face and pretend nothing ever happened between you and her?”

Damn. She knows. Or at least, she thinks she knows.

“I have feelings for Millie,” he says in a voice so quiet, I’m sure I must’ve imagined it. How could this rich, handsome, married man have feelings for me? “But that’s not what this is about. This is about you and me. I don’t love you anymore.”

“This is bullshit!” The pitch of Nina’s voice is going up to the point where soon only dogs will be able to hear her. “You’re leaving me for our maid! This is the most ridiculous thing I’ve ever heard. This is an embarrassment to you. You’re better than this, Andrew.”

“Nina.” His tone is firm. “It’s over. I’m sorry.”

“Sorry?” Another crack of thunder shakes the floorboards. “Oh, you don’t know what sorry is...”

There’s a pause. “Excuse me?”

“If you try to go through with this,” she growls at him, “I will destroy you in court. I will make sure you are left penniless and homeless.”

“Homeless? This is my home, Nina. I bought it before we even knew each other. I allow you to stay here. We have a prenup, as you recall, and after our marriage ends, it will be mine again.” He pauses again. “And now I’d like you to leave.”

I hazard a look around the stairwell. If I crouch, I can make out Nina standing in the center of the living room, her face pale. Her mouth opens and closes like a fish. “You can’t be serious about this, Andy,” she sputters.

“I am very serious.”

“But...” She clutches her chest. “What about Cece?”

“Cece is your daughter. You never wanted me to adopt her.”

It sounds like she’s speaking through gritted teeth. “Oh, I see what this is about. It’s because I can’t have another baby. You want somebody younger, who can give you a child. I’m not good enough anymore.”

“That’s not what this is about,” he says. Although on some level, maybe it is. Andrew does want another child. And he can’t have that with Nina.

Her voice trembles. “Andy, please don’t do this to me... Don’t humiliate me this way. Please.”

“I’d like you to leave, Nina. Right now.”

“But it’s raining!”

Andrew’s voice doesn’t waver. “Pack a bag and get out.”

I can almost hear her weighing her options. Whatever else I can say about Nina Winchester, she’s not stupid. Finally, her shoulders sag. “Fine. I’ll leave.”

Nina's footsteps thud in the direction of the stairs. It occurs to me a second too late that I need to move out of sight. Nina lifts her eyes and sees me standing at the top of the stairs. Her eyes burn with anger like nothing I've ever seen. I should run back to my room, but my legs feel frozen as her heels bite into the steps one by one.

The lightning flashes one last time when she reaches the top of the stairs, and the glow on her face makes her look like she's standing at the gates of hell.

“Do...” My lips feel numb, it's almost hard to form the words. “Do you need help packing?”

There's such venom in her eyes, I'm afraid she's going to reach into my chest and yank my heart out with her bare hands. “Do I need help packing? No, I believe I can manage.”

Nina goes into her bedroom, slamming the door behind her. I am not sure what to do. I could go up to the attic, but then I look downstairs where Andrew is still in the living room. He's looking up at me, so I descend the stairs to talk to him.

“I'm so sorry!” My words come out in a rush. “I didn't mean to...”

“Don't you dare blame yourself,” he says. “This was a long time coming.”

I glance at the window, which is drenched with rain. “Do you want me to... go?”

“No,” he says. “I want you to stay.”

He touches my arm and a tingle goes through me. All I can think is that I want him to kiss me, but he can't do it right now. Not with Nina right upstairs.

But soon she'll be gone.

About ten minutes later, Nina comes down the stairs, struggling with a bag on each shoulder. Yesterday, she would have made me carry those and laughed at how weak I was. Now she has to do it herself. When I look up at her, her eyes are puffy and her hair is disheveled. She looks terrible. I don't think I realized exactly how old she was

until this moment.

“Please don’t do this, Andy,” she begs him. “Please.”

A muscle twitches in his jaw. The thunder cracks again, but it’s softer than it was before. The storm is moving away. “I’ll help you put your bags in the car.”

She chokes back a sob. “Don’t bother.”



She trudges over to the door to the garage that’s just off the side of the living room, struggling with her heavy bags. Andrew tries to reach out to help her, but she shrugs him away. She fumbles to get the door open to the garage. Instead of putting her bags down, she’s trying to juggle them both and get the door open. It takes her several minutes, and I finally can’t stand it anymore. I sprint over to the door, and before she can stop me, I turn the knob and throw it open for her.

“Gee,” she says. “Thanks so much.”

I don’t know how to respond. I just stand there as she pushes past me with her bags. Just before she goes through the door, she leans in close to me—so close that I can feel her hot breath on my neck.

“I will never forget this, Millie,” she hisses in my ear.

My heart flutters in my chest. Her words echo in my ears as she tosses her bags into the back of her white Lexus, and then zooms out of the garage.

She left the garage door open. I can see the rain pouring down onto the driveway as a gust of wind whips me in the face. I stand there for a moment, unsure what to do next.