Chapter 25

Chapter 25

It’s a beautiful June evening. I brought a wrap with me, but it’s so warm out, I end up leaving it in Andrew’s car, so I’ve got nothing besides my white dress and my purse that doesn’t match as we wait in line to be allowed into the theater.

I gasp when I see the inside of the theater. I don’t think I’ve ever seen anything like this in my lifetime. The orchestra alone contains rows and rows of seats, but then when I lift my head, there are two sets of seats stretching up all the way to the ceiling above. And up in the front is a red curtain that is lit from below with tantalizing yellow light.

When I finally tear my eyes away from the sight in front of me, I noticed Andrew has an amused look on his face. “What?” I say.

“It’s just cute,” he says. “The look on your face. I’m so used to it, but I love seeing it through your eyes.”

“It’s just so big,” I say self-consciously.

An usher comes to hand us playbills and lead us to our seats. And then comes the really amazing part—he keeps leading us closer and closer and closer. And when we finally get to our seats, I can’t believe how close we are to the stage. If I wanted, I could grab the actors by their ankles. Not that I would because that would definitely violate my parole, but it might be possible.

As I sit next to Andrew in one of the best seats of the hottest show in town in this amazing theater, I don’t feel like a girl who just got out of prison, who doesn’t have a penny to her name, who is working a job she hates. I feel special. Like maybe I deserve to be here.

I gaze at Andrew’s profile. This is all because of him. He could have been a jerk about the whole thing and charged me for the tickets, or gone with a friend of his. He would have had every right to do so. But he didn’t. He took me here tonight. And I’ll never forget it.

“Thank you,” I blurt out.

He rotates his head to look at me. His lips curl. He’s so handsome when he smiles. “My pleasure.”

Over the music playing and the commotion of people finding their seats, I just barely hear a buzzing sound coming from my purse. It’s my phone. I take it out and discover a message from Nina on the screen:

Don’t forget to put out the trash.

I grit my teeth. If anything can bring your fantasies of being more than a maid to a screeching halt, it’s a message from your employer telling you to lug the garbage to the curb. Nina always reminds me about trash day, every single week, even though I’ve never once forgotten. But the absolute worst part is that when I see her text, I realize that I have forgotten to take the garbage to the curb. I usually do it after dinner, and the change in the schedule threw me off.

It’s fine though. I just have to remember to do it tonight when we get back. After Andrew’s BMW turns back into a pumpkin.

“You okay?”

Andrew’s eyebrows are knitted together as he watches me read the text. My warm feelings for him evaporate slightly. Andrew isn’t a guy I’m dating who is spoiling me with a Broadway show. He’s my employer. He’s married. He only brought me here because he feels sorry for me for being so uncultured.

And I can’t let myself forget it.

The show is absolutely amazing. I am literally at the edge of my seat in the sixth row, my mouth hanging open. I can tell why this show is one of the most popular on Broadway. The musical numbers are so catchy, the dance numbers are so elaborate, and the actor playing the lead is dreamy.

Although I can't help but think he's not quite as handsome as Andrew.

After three standing ovations, the show is finally over and the audience starts to filter toward the exits. Andrew leisurely rises from his seat and stretches out a kink in his back. "So how about some dinner?"

I slide the playbill into my purse. It's risky to save it, but I'm desperate to hold onto the memory of this magical experience. "Sounds good. Do you have a place in mind?"

"There's an amazing French restaurant a couple of blocks away. Do you like French food?"

"I've never had French food before," I admit. "Although I like the fries."

He laughs. "I think you'll enjoy it. My treat, of course. What do you say?"

I say that Nina wouldn't enjoy finding out that her husband took me to a Broadway show and then treated me to an expensive French dinner. But what the hell. We're already here, and it's not like the meal would make her more mad than the show alone. May as well go for broke. "Sounds good."

In my old life, before I worked for the Winchesters, I never could have gone into a French restaurant like the one where Andrew takes me. There's a menu posted on the door, and I only glance at a few of the prices, but any appetizer would wipe me out for several weeks. But standing next to Andrew, wearing Nina's white dress, I fit in here. Nobody is going to ask me to leave, anyway.

I'm sure as we walk into the restaurant, everybody thinks we're a couple. I saw our reflection in the glass outside the restaurant, and we look good together. If I'm honest, we look better as a couple than he and Nina do. Nobody notices that he has a wedding

band and I don’t. What they might notice is the way he gently places a hand on the small of my back to lead me to our table, then pulls out a chair for me.

“You’re such a gentleman,” I remark.

He chuckles. “Thank my mother. That’s the way I was raised.”

“Well, she raised you right.”

He beams at me. “She’d be very glad to hear that.”

Of course, it makes me think about Cecelia. That spoiled little brat who seemed to get off on ordering me around. Then again, Cecelia has been through a lot. Her mother tried to murder her, after all.

When the waiter comes to take our drink orders, Andrew orders a glass of red wine, so I do the same. I don’t even look at the prices. It’s just going to make me sick, and he already said he’s paying.

“I have no idea what to order.” None of the names of dishes sound familiar; the whole menu is in French. “Do you understand this menu?”

“Oui,” Andrew says.

I raise my eyebrows. “Do you speak French?”

“Oui, mademoiselle.” He winks at me. “I’m fluent, actually. I spent my junior year of college studying in Paris.”

“Wow.” Not only did I not spend any time studying French in college, I never went to college at all. My high school diploma is a GED.

“Do you want me to read the menu to you in English?”

My cheeks grow warm. “You don’t have to do that. Just pick out some things you think I’d like.”

He looks pleased by that answer. “Okay, I can do that.”

The waiter arrives with a bottle of wine and two glasses. I watch as he uncorks the bottle and pours us both heaping glasses. Andrew gestures for him to leave the bottle. I grab my glass and take a long sip.

Oh God, that’s really good. So much better than what I get for five bucks at the local liquor store.

“How about you?” he says. “Do you speak any other languages?”

I shake my head. “I’m lucky I speak English.”

Andrew doesn’t smile at my joke. “You shouldn’t put yourself down, Millie. You’ve been working for us for months, and you have a great work ethic and you’re obviously smart. I don’t even know why you would want this job, although we’re lucky to have you. Don’t you have any other career aspirations?”

I play with my napkin, avoiding his eyes. He doesn’t know anything about me. If he did, he would understand. “I don’t want to talk about it.”

He hesitates for a moment, then he nods, respecting my request. “Well, either way, I’m glad you came out tonight.”

I lift my eyes and his brown ones are staring at me across the table. “Me too.”

He looks like he’s about to say something more, but then his phone starts ringing. He pulls it out of his pocket and looks at the screen while I take another sip of wine. It’s so good, I want to guzzle it. But that wouldn’t be a good idea.

“It’s Nina.” Maybe it’s my imagination, but he has a pained expression on his face. “I better take this.”

I can’t hear what Nina is saying, but her shaky voice is audible across the table. She sounds upset. He holds the phone about a centimeter from his ear, wincing with each word.

“Nina,” he says. “Look, it’s… yeah, I won’t… Nina, just relax.” He purses his lips. “I can’t talk to you about this right now. I’ll see you when you get home tomorrow, okay?”

Andrew jabs at a button on his phone to end the call, then he slams the phone on the table next to him. Finally, he picks up his wine glass and drains about half the contents.

“Everything okay?” I ask.

“Yeah.” He presses his fingertips into his temples. “I just… I love Nina, but sometimes I can’t figure out how my marriage got this way. Where ninety percent of our interactions are her yelling at me.”

I don’t know what to say to that. “I… I’m sorry. If it makes you feel better, that describes ninety percent of my interactions with her also.”

His lips twitch. “Well, we’ve got that in common.”

“So… she used to be different?”

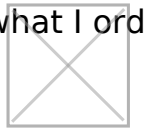
“Completely different.” He grabs his wine and drains the rest of it. “When we met, she was a single mom working two jobs. I admired her so much. She had a hard life, and her strength was what drew me to her. And now… She doesn’t do anything except complain. She doesn’t have any interest in working. She spoils Cecelia. And the worst part is…”

“What?”

He picks up the bottle of wine and fills up his glass again. He runs his finger along the rim. “Nothing. Never mind. I shouldn’t…” He looks around the restaurant. “Where is our waiter?”

I’m dying to know what Andrew was about to confess to me. But then our waiter rushes over, eager for the giant tip he will almost certainly get from this meal, and it

looks like the moment has passed.

Andrew orders for the both of us, as he said he would. I don’t even ask him what he has ordered, because I want it to be a surprise and I’m sure it will be incredible. I’m also impressed with his French accent. I’ve always wished I could speak another language. It’s probably too late for me though.

“I hope you like what I ordered,” he says, almost shyly.