

Chapter 19

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The next morning, Nina has morphed back into the more pleasant version of herself, having seemingly forgotten last night. I would think it was all a terrifying dream except for the bandage wrapped around her right hand. The white gauze is dotted with crimson.

Although she's not being directly weird with me, Nina is more frazzled than usual this morning. When she goes to drive Cecelia to school, her tires screech against the pavement. When she returns, she just stands in the middle of the living room for a moment, staring at the walls, until I finally come out of the kitchen and ask if she's all right.

"I'm fine." She tugs at the collar of her white blouse, which is wrinkled even though I am certain I ironed it. "Would you be so kind as to make me some breakfast, Millie? The usual?"

"Of course," I say.

"The usual" for Nina is three eggs, scrambled in a lot of butter and Parmesan cheese, four slices of bacon, and an English muffin, also buttered. I can't help but think of the comments the other PTA woman made about Nina's weight while she was in the other room, although I respect that she doesn't scrutinize every calorie that goes in her mouth the way they do. Nina isn't gluten-free or vegan. As far as I can tell, she eats whatever she wants and then some. She even has late-night snacks, as evidenced by the dirty plates she leaves behind on the counter for me to wash in the morning. Not one of those plates has ever made it into the dishwasher.

I serve the plate of food to her at the dining table with a glass of orange juice on the side. She scrutinizes the food, and I'm worried I've got the version of Nina that's going to tell me that everything on this plate is cooked poorly, or else claim that she flat out never asked me for breakfast in the first place. But instead, she smiles sweetly at me. "Thank you, Millie."

"You're welcome." I hesitate, hovering over her. "By the way, Andrew asked me if I would get you two tickets to Showdown on Broadway."



Her eyes light up. "He's so thoughtful. Yes, that would be lovely."

"What are some days that work for you?"

She scoops some eggs into her mouth and chews thoughtfully. "I'm free a week from Sunday, if you can swing it."

"Sure. And I can watch Cecelia, of course."

She scoops more eggs into her mouth. Some of it misses her lips and falls onto her white blouse. She doesn't seem to even notice it's there and continues shoveling food into her mouth.

"Thank you again, Millie." She winks at me. "I really don't know what we would do without you."

She likes to tell me that. Or that she's going to fire me. One or the other. But I suppose it's not her fault. Nina definitely has emotional problems like her friends said. I can't stop thinking about her alleged stay in a psychiatric hospital. They don't lock you up for nothing. Something bad must've happened, and part of me is dying to know what it is. But it's not like I could ask her. And my attempts to get the story out of Enzo have been fruitless.

Nina has nearly cleaned her entire plate, having devoured the eggs, bacon, and English muffin in less than five minutes, when Andrew jogs downstairs. I had been a little worried about him after last night, even though I heard the water running. Not

that it was a likely scenario, but maybe, I don't know, Nina had the faucet on some sort of automatic timer just to make it seem like he was in the bathroom, alive and well. Like I said, it didn't seem likely, but it also didn't seem impossible. In any case, it's a relief to find him intact. My breath catches a bit at the sight of his dark gray suit paired with a light blue dress shirt.

Just before Andrew enters the dining room, Nina pushes her plate of food away. She stands up and smooths out her blond hair, which lacks its usual shine, and the dark roots are even more visible than before.

"Hello, Andy." She offers him a dazzling smile. "How are you this morning?"

He starts to answer her, but then his eyes dart down to the bit of egg still clinging to her blouse. One side of his lips quirks up. "Nina, you have a little egg on you."

"Oh!" Her cheeks turn pink as she dabs at the egg on her blouse. But it's been sitting there several minutes, and a stain still mars the delicate white fabric. "Sorry about that!"

"It's okay—you still look beautiful." He grabs her shoulders and pulls her in for a kiss. I watch her melt against him and ignore the twinge of jealousy in my chest. "I've got to run to the office, but I'll see you tonight."

"I'll walk you out, darling."

Nina is so freaking lucky. She's got everything. Yes, she did have a stay at a mental institution, but at least she wasn't in prison. And here she is, with an incredible house, tons of money, and a husband who is kind, funny, wealthy, considerate, and... well, absolutely gorgeous.

I close my eyes for a moment and think about what it would be like to live in Nina's shoes. To be the woman in charge of this household. To have the expensive clothing and the shoes and the fancy car. To have a maid I could boss around—force her to cook for me and clean for me and live in a tiny hole in the attic while I had the big

bedroom with the king-size bed and zillion-count sheets. And most of all, to have a husband like Andrew. To have him press his lips against mine the way he did to hers. To feel his body heat against my chest...

Oh my God, I must stop thinking about this. Now. In my defense, it's been a really long time for me. I spent ten years in prison, fantasizing about some perfect guy I would meet when I got out, who would save me from everything. And now...

Well, it could happen. It's possible.

I climb the stairs and get to work making the beds and cleaning the bedrooms. I've just finished up and am returning downstairs when the doorbell rings. I hurry over to answer it, and I'm surprised to see Enzo at the door, clutching a giant cardboard box in his arms.

"Ciao," I say, remembering the greeting he taught me.

Amusement flickers over his face. "Ciao. This... for you."

I understand immediately what must've happened. Sometimes delivery people don't realize they can enter through the gate, so they dump heavy packages outside the gate, and I have to heave them into the house. Enzo must have seen the delivery man leave the package, and now he's kindly carried it in for me.

"Grazie," I say.

He raises his eyebrows at me. "You want I..."

It takes me a second to realize what he is asking. "Oh... yes, just put it on the dining table."

I point to the dining table and he carries the package over there. I remember Nina freaked out that time when Enzo came into the house, but she's not here and that box looks too heavy for me to lift. After he rests it on the table, I glance at the return address: Evelyn Winchester. Probably somebody in Andrew's family.

“Grazie,” I say again.

Enzo nods. He’s wearing a white T-shirt and jeans—he looks good. He’s always out somewhere in the neighborhood, working up a sweat in the yard, and a lot of the rich women in this neighborhood love to ogle him.

Truthfully, I prefer Andrew’s looks, and of course, there’s the language barrier. But maybe having a little fun with Enzo would be good for me. It would relieve a little of that pent-up energy, and maybe I would stop having wholly inappropriate fantasies about my boss’s husband.

I’m not quite sure how to broach the subject, given he doesn’t seem to speak any English. But I’m pretty sure the language of love is universal.

“Water?” I offer him, while I’m trying to figure out exactly how to go about this.

He nods. “Si.”

I run to the kitchen and grab a glass from the cabinet. I fill it halfway with water, then I bring it out to him. He takes it gratefully. “Grazie.”

His biceps bulge as he drinks from the glass. He has a really good body. I wonder what he’s like in bed. Probably fantastic.

I wring my hands together as he drinks from the glass of water. “So, um... are you... busy?”

He lowers the glass and looks at me blankly. “Eh?”

“Um.” I clear my throat. “Like, do you have much... work?”

“Work.” He nods at a word he understands. Seriously, I don’t get it. He’s been working here three years, and he really doesn’t understand any English? “Si. Molto occupato.”

“Oh.”

This isn’t going well. Maybe I should just get right to the point.