

Chapter 11

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“Millie!” Nina’s voice sounds frantic on the other line. “I need you to pick up Cecelia from school!”



I’ve got a pile of laundry balanced in my arms, and my cell phone is between my shoulder and my ear. I always pick up immediately when Nina calls, no matter what I’m doing. Because if I don’t, she will call over and over (and over) until I do.

“Sure, no problem,” I say.

“Oh, thank you!” Nina gushes. “You’re such a dear! Just grab her from the Winter Academy at 2:45! You’re the best, Millie!”

Before I can ask any other questions, like where I’m supposed to meet Cecelia or the address of the Winter Academy, Nina has hung up. As I remove the phone wedged under my ear, I feel a jolt of panic when I see the time. I’ve got less than fifteen minutes to figure out where this school is and retrieve my employer’s daughter. Laundry is going to have to wait.

I type the name of the school into Google as I sprint down the stairs. Nothing comes up. The closest school by that name is in Wisconsin, and even though Nina makes some odd requests, I doubt she expects me to pick her daughter up in Wisconsin in fifteen minutes. I call Nina back, but naturally, she doesn’t pick up. Neither does Andy when I try him.

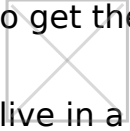
Great.

While I pace across the kitchen, trying to figure out what to do next, I notice a piece of paper stuck to the refrigerator with a magnet. It’s a school holiday schedule. From the

Windsor Academy.

She said Winter. Winter Academy. I'm sure of it. Didn't she?

I don't have time to wonder if Nina told me the wrong name or if she doesn't know the name of the school her daughter attends, where she is also vice president of the PTA. Thankfully, there's an address on the flier, so I know exactly where to go. And I've only got ten minutes to get there.



The Winchesters live in a town that boasts some of the best public schools in the country, but Cecelia goes to private school, because of course she does. The Windsor Academy is a huge elegant structure with lots of ivory columns, dark brown bricks, and ivy running along the walls that makes me feel like I'm picking Cecelia up at Hogwarts or something unreal like that.

One other thing I wish Nina had warned me about was the parking situation at pick-up time. It is an absolute nightmare. I have to drive around for several minutes searching for a spot, and I finally squeeze in between a Mercedes and a Rolls-Royce. I'm scared somebody might tow my dented Nissan just on principle.

Given how little time I had to get to the school, I'm huffing and puffing as I sprint to the entrance. And naturally, there are five separate entrances. Which one will Cecelia be coming out of? There's no indication where I should go. I try calling Nina again, but once more, the call goes to voicemail. Where is she? It's none of my business, but the woman doesn't have a job and I do all the chores. What could she be doing with herself?

After questioning several irritable parents, I ascertain that Cecelia will be coming out of the very last entrance on the right side of the school. But just because I am determined not to screw this up, I approach two immaculately dressed women chatting by the door and ask, "Is this the exit for the fourth graders?"

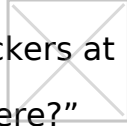
"Yes, it is." The thinner of the two women—a brunette with the most perfectly shaped eyebrows I've ever seen—looks me up and down. "Who are you looking for?"

I squirm under her gaze. “Cecelia Winchester.”

The two women exchange knowing looks. “You must be the new maid Nina hired,” the shorter woman—a redhead—says.

“Housekeeper,” I correct her, although I don’t know why. Nina can call me whatever she wants.

The brunette snickers at my comment but doesn’t say anything about it. “So how is it so far working there?”



She’s digging for dirt. Good luck with that—I’m not going to give her any. “It’s great.”

The women exchange looks again. “So Nina isn’t driving you crazy?” the redhead asks me.

“What do you mean?” I say carefully. I don’t want to gossip with these harpies, but at the same time, I’m curious about Nina.

“Nina is just a bit... high strung,” the brunette says.

“Nina is nuts,” the redhead pipes up. “Literally.”

I suck in a breath. “What?”

The brunette elbows the redhead hard enough to make her gasp. “Nothing. She’s just joking around.”

At that moment, the doors to the school swing open and children pour out. If there were any chance to get more information out of these two women, the chance is gone as they both move in the direction of their own fourth graders. But I can’t stop thinking about what they said.

I spot Cecelia’s pale blond hair near the entrance. Even though most of the other kids are wearing jeans and T-shirts, she’s wearing another lacy dress, this one a pale sea green. She sticks out like a sore thumb. I have no problem keeping her in my sight as I

move toward her.

“Cecelia!” I wave my arm frantically as I get closer. “I’m here to pick you up!”

Cecelia looks at me like she would much rather get into the back of the van of some bearded homeless man than go home with me. She shakes her head and turns away from me.

“Cecelia!” I say, more sharply. “Come on. Your mom said I should pick you up.”



She turns back to look at me, and her eyes say she thinks I’m a moron. “No, she didn’t. Sophia’s mother is picking me up and taking me to karate.”

Before I can protest, a woman in her forties wearing yoga pants and a pullover comes over and rests her hand on Cecelia’s shoulder. “Ready for karate, girls?”

I blink up at the woman. She does not appear to be a kidnapper. But there’s obviously been some misunderstanding. Nina called me and told me to pick up Cecelia. She was very clear about it. Well, except for the part where she told me the wrong school. But other than that, she was very clear.

“Excuse me,” I say to the woman. “I work for the Winchesters and Nina asked me to pick up Cecelia today.”

The woman arches an eyebrow and places a recently manicured hand on her hip. “I don’t think so. I pick up Cecelia every single Wednesday and...”