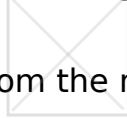


Chapter 20

Chapter 20

God, that was humiliating.



I'm still reeling from the mortification of Enzo rejecting me while I'm waiting for Cecelia to finish her tap-dancing class. My head is throbbing, and the tapping of little feet in unison coming from the dance classroom isn't helping matters at all. I look around the room, wondering if anyone else finds it as annoying as I do. No? Just me?

The woman in the seat next to mine finally gives me a sympathetic look. Based on her naturally smooth skin, with no signs of a facelift or Botox, I'd estimate her to be about my age, which makes me think she's not picking up her own kid, either. She's one of the servants, like me.

"Advil?" she asks. She must have a sixth sense to notice my discomfort. Either that or my sighs are giving her the message.

I hesitate, then nod. A painkiller won't get rid of the humiliation of the hot Italian landscaper turning me down, but it will ease my headache at least.

She reaches into her big black purse and takes out a bottle of Advil. She raises her eyebrows at me, then I put out my hand and she shakes two little red pills into my palm. I throw them back into my mouth and swallow them dry. I wonder how long it'll take them to kick in.

"I'm Amanda, by the way," she tells me. "I'm your official tap-dancing waiting-room drug dealer."

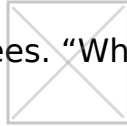
I laugh, despite myself. "Who are you here to pick up?"

She flicks her brown ponytail off her shoulder. “The Bernstein twins. You should see them tap dance in unison. It’s something to behold—speaking of pounding headaches. How about you?”

“Cecelia Winchester.”

Amanda lets out a low whistle. “You work for the Winchesters? Good luck with that.”

I squeeze my knees. “What do you mean?”



She lifts a shoulder. “Nina Winchester. You know. She’s...” She makes the universal “cuckoo” sign with her index finger. “Right?”

“How do you know?”

“Oh, everyone knows.” She shoots me a look. “Also, I get the feeling Nina is the jealous type. And her husband is really hot—don’t you think?”

I avert my eyes. “He’s okay, I guess.”

Amanda starts digging around in her purse as I lick my lips. This is the opportunity I’ve been waiting for. Somebody I can pump for information about Nina.

“So,” I say, “why do people say Nina is crazy?”

She looks up, and for a moment I’m scared she’s going to be offended by my obvious digging. But she just grins. “You know she was locked up in a loony bin, right? Everyone talks about it.”

I wince at her use of the term “loony bin.” I’m sure she has some equally colorful terms for the place where I spent the last decade of my life. But I need to hear this. My heart speeds up, beating in sync with the tapping of little feet in the other room. “I did hear something about that...”

Amanda clucks. “Cecelia was a baby then. Poor thing—if the police had arrived a second later...”

“What?”

She drops her voice a notch, looking around the room. “You know what she did, don’t you?”

I shake my head wordlessly.

“It was horrible...” Amanda sucks in a breath. “She tried to drown Cecelia in the bathtub.”



I clasp a hand over my mouth. “She... what?”

She nods solemnly. “Nina drugged her, threw her in the tub with running water, then took a bunch of pills herself.”

I open my mouth but no words come out. I have been expecting some story like, I don’t know, she got into a fight with some other mother at ballet practice over the best color for tutus and then had a meltdown when they couldn’t agree. Or maybe her favorite manicurist decided to retire and...