

17 Marigold Lane

Excerpt

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Jamie Lee was whimpering in a closet with a wire hanger as her only defense when something banged loudly against the front door. I jumped, and Cassius's head shot toward the noise. Hoping it was just a branch *thwapping* against the house, I waited in silence for more. When two distinct raps rattled the door, I knew someone was out there and wanted in. Or more accurately, wanted someone to come out.

"Do your parents know you're here?" Mom whispered angrily as she hustled from the kitchen to the door. I hoped she had a plan, because at that moment, I was fairly useless.

The door was hardly open an inch when the bellowing voice of Mr. Shooster outbid the rain for volume. "Mrs. Penderhaus, I thought I made myself clear." Cassius stood, pulled his hood over his face, and sank back into the couch. "I'd like my son, and I'd like this to be the first and last time I stand on your front porch."

"I can arrange that," Mom said with surprising snark. "Cass, honey, your dad is here." She called him Cass and he didn't correct her. Either he didn't care or something else was blocking that from his mind.

He didn't budge. Only the quick movement of his chest rising and falling with each anxious breath indicated he was alive inside that hood. I nudged at his leg with my foot, too scared to lean across the couch and touch him in any other way for fear his dad would see me and fly into a fit of rage.

"Hey, your dad's here," I said quietly, so as to not alert anyone of my participation.

"Cassius, son, now it's time you come home. You know you're not supposed to be down here bothering the Penderhaus ladies."

"He's no bother," Mom reassured, still blocking the doorway with her stocky frame.

"Cassius Shooster, come out here now. It's time to go home," he said in a tone far angrier than the previous.

"He's more than welcome to stay for dinner." Mom's continued hindrance appeared to piss Mr. Shooster off more than he could stand, because a moment later, he shoved past Mom and was through the door, snatching his son up by the arm.

"Excuse me," Mom growled at him, in shock over his antics. "Douchebag," she said under her breath. He ignored her completely.

"Now, I said you are not to come down here. Sheriff Floyd can't make me allow that, and he knows it. Get up off this couch and get home. Your mother is worried sick."

I jumped from my seat. “Oh, I’ll bet she is,” I said, folding my arms over my chest, almost squeezing a little too tight. “Or is she just stuck in a perpetual hangover and without her punching bag?”

Mr. Shooster snarled at me.

Mom had scurried into the living room after Mr. Shooster, ready to usher him right back out. He grabbed Cassius by the arm and turned quickly to drag him out, nearly running right over the top of her.

“Don’t you barge into my house, Shooster. I’ll call Elroy Floyd again.” She wagged a thick finger at him.

“Not necessary. I have what I came for.”

Mr. Shooster stormed out of the house, dragging Cassius behind him. Panicked, he looked back at me over his shoulder. His hood fell back from his face and exposed an expression red from fury. Stumbling over big feet, Cassius struggled against the pull of his father but didn’t bother physically overpowering him, which I thought he might be able to do. Thin or not, Cassius was a seventeen-ish-year-old boy; he surely had some stamina over his similarly built but aging father.

“We’ll see you soon, sweetie,” Mom said with an annoyed smile as they hurried out the door. “Goodnight.”

I stood in the living room, my lips pursed, nearly white from rage. Life was short. Too damn short for such absurd antics. Impulse won the war with rationale and I bolted for the door. Thoughtlessly shoving Mom out of the way, I didn’t stop until I hit the end of our walkway.

“Cassius,” I called out into the rainy night. “See you tomorrow.” I didn’t know if that was true or not, but I had to say *something*.

If he and I were characters in a movie, I would have yelled something more along the lines of “I love you,” or “don’t forget about me.” Alas, real life had no room for things of that magnitude and nothing—rarely—ever happened like it did in the movies.

Soaked from the rain, I turned on a sad heel and loped toward the house. Cassius never answered or even attempted to let me know he’d heard me. Instead, he disappeared into the sheets of rain with his dad. Two tall, thin, dark figures making their way through the stormy night to their ironically creepy house, where one of them was being held against his will.

Maybe a movie wasn’t such an inaccurate description.

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