

Chapter 25

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Celia was shooting a movie on location in Big Bear for three weeks. I knew that going with her wasn't an option, nor was visiting her on the set. She insisted she would come home every weekend, but it felt too risky.

She was a single girl, after all. I was afraid the prevailing wisdom erred too close to the question What do single girls have to go home to?

So I decided it was the right time to go to France.

Harry had some connections to filmmakers in Paris. He made a few calls on the sly for me.

Some of the producers and directors I met with knew who I was. Some of them were clearly seeing me just as a favor to Harry. And then there was Max Girard, an up-and-coming New Wave director, who had never heard of me before.

"You are une bombe," he said.

We were sitting in a quiet bar in the Saint-Germain-de-Prés neighborhood of Paris. We huddled in a booth in the back. It was just after dinnertime, and I hadn't had a chance to eat. Max was drinking a white Bordeaux. I had a glass of claret.

"That sounds like a compliment," I said, taking a sip.

"I don't know if I have before met a woman so attractive," he said, staring at me. His accent was so thick that I found myself leaning in to hear him.

"Thank you."

"You can act?" he said.

"Better than I look."

"That cannot be so."

"It is."

I saw Max's wheels start turning. "Are you willing to test for a part?"

I was willing to scrub a toilet for a part. "If the part is great," I said.

Max smiled. "This part is spectacular. This part is a movie-star part."

I nodded slowly. You have to restrain every part of your body when you are working hard not to look eager.

"Send me the pages, and we'll talk," I said, and then I drank the last of my wine and stood up. "I'm so sorry, Max, but I should go. Have a wonderful evening. Let's be in touch."

There was absolutely no way I was going to sit at a bar with a man who hadn't heard of me and let him think I had all the time in the world.

I could feel his eyes on me as I walked away, but I walked out the door with all the confidence I had—which, despite my current predicament, was quite a lot. And then I went back to my hotel room, put on my pajamas, ordered room service, and turned on the TV.

Before I went to bed, I wrote Celia a letter.

My Dearest CeCe,

Please never forget that the sun rises and sets with your smile. At least to me it does. You're the only thing on this planet worth worshipping.

All my love,

Edward

I folded it in half and tucked it into an envelope addressed to her. Then I turned out my light and closed my eyes.

Three hours later, I was awakened by the jarring sound of a phone ringing on the table next to me.

I picked it up, irritated and half asleep.

"Bonjour?" I said.

"We can speak your language, Evelyn." Max's accented English reverberated through the phone. "I am calling to see if you would be free to be in a movie I am shooting. The week after next."

"Two weeks from now?"

"Not even, quite. We are shooting six hours from Paris. You will do it?"

"What is the part? How long is the shoot?"

"The movie is called *Boute-en-Train*. At least, that's what it is called for now. We shoot for two weeks in Lac d'Annecy. The rest of the shoot you do not need to be there."

"What does *Boute-en-Train* mean?" I tried to say it the way he said it, but it came out overprocessed, and I vowed not to try again. Don't do things you're not good at.

"It means the life of the party. That is you."

"A party girl?"

"Like someone who is the heart of life."

"And my character?"

"She is the kind of woman every man falls in love with. It was originally written for a French woman, but I have just decided tonight that if you will do it, I will fire her."

"That's not nice."

"She's not you."

I smiled, surprised at both his charm and his eagerness.

"It is about two men who are petty thieves, and they are on the run to Switzerland when they are distracted by an incredible woman they meet on the way. The three of them go for an adventure in the mountains. I have been sitting here with my pages, trying to decide if this woman can be American. And I think she can. I think it's more interesting that way. It is a stroke of luck. To meet you at this time. So you will do it?"

"Let me sleep on it," I said. I knew I was going to take the part. It was the only part I could get. But you never get anywhere good by seeming amenable.

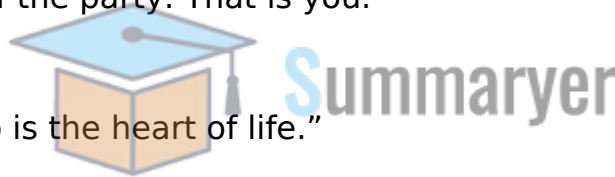
"Yes," Max said. "Of course. You have done nudity before, yes?"

"No," I said.

"I think you should be topless. In the film."

If I was going to be asked to show my breasts, wouldn't it be for a French film? And if the French were going to ask anyone, shouldn't it be me? I knew what got me famous the first time. I knew what it could do a second time.

"Why don't we discuss it tomorrow?" I said.



“Let’s talk tomorrow morning,” he said. “Because this other actress I have, she will show her breasts, Evelyn.”

“It’s late, Max. I’ll ring you in the morning.” And I hung up the phone.

I closed my eyes and breathed in deeply, considering both how beneath me this opportunity was and how lucky I was to be given it. It’s a hard business, reconciling what the truth used to be with what the truth is now. Luckily, I didn’t have to do it for very long.

Two weeks later, I was back on a film set. And this time, I was free of all the buttoned-up, innocent-girl stuff that *Sunset* had pinned on me. This time, I was able to do whatever I wanted.

It was clear for the entire shoot that Max wanted nothing more than to possess me himself. I could tell by the way he looked at me in stolen glances that part of my allure to Max the director was my allure to him as a man.

When Max came to my dressing room on the second-to-last day of filming, he said, “Ma belle, aujourd’hui tu seras seins nus.” I had picked up enough French by then to know he was saying he wanted to shoot my scene coming out of the lake. When you’re an American movie star with huge boobs in a French movie, you quickly learn that when French men are saying *seins nus*, they are talking about you being topless. I was fully willing to take my top off and show my assets if that was what it took to get my name back out there. But by that point, I had fallen madly in love with a woman. I had grown to desire her with every fiber of myself. I knew the pleasure of finding delight in a woman’s naked body.

So I told Max I’d shoot it however he wanted but that I had a suggestion that might make the movie even more of a sensation.