OUT OF THE NIGHT

The Epic Story of RJ and York Book 1

EXCERPT

Chapter 1

York wasn't a coward. Not even a little. Besides, RJ was going to say yes.

It was just that he wanted it to be perfect. In every way—from the ambiance, to the food, the stroll along the Seine under a twinkle-light sky, even down to the buskers singing romantic French songs.

Everything had been meticulously planned and was now aligned for the moment he got down on one knee and asked Ruby Jane Marshall to marry him. Finally.

And really, that was the only reason it had taken him so very long—painfully, ridiculously, stupidly long for him to propose. Because after a year and a half of chasing down bad guys—namely, a plot to kill the president by one former vice-president, which included checking and rechecking their evidence for the federal prosecutor—he was so very ready to make good on his promise to return to small town Shelly, Montana, and build a life together.

One that included a front porch view of Lake Shelly, via the gorgeous timber-framed house he'd put an offer on—a surprise wedding gift for RJ.

Yes, York had it all figured out. Once they'd gotten clear of the trial, he'd booked this trip to Paris, purchased a beautiful vintage two carat diamond ring, made dinner reservations at the famed Le Jules Verne restaurant at the Eiffel Tower, with the glittering lights of Paris sprayed at their footsteps. And tonight, during their romantic after dinner walk, he'd tell her how she'd changed his life.

How, somehow, despite his losses, the wounds, she'd healed him.

Most of all, that he couldn't wait one more minute to marry her, if she'd have him. In his mind's eye, she said yes, of course, and leaped into his arms, and—

It would all end happily, he knew it in his heart.

He just had to get to the restaurant in time. Which meant getting through the massive crowd that thronged the entrance to grand, historic Hôtel Le Bristol.

“Are you kidding me?” RJ said next to him, her hand in his. Oh, she looked devastatingly beautiful tonight, her dark hair back in a smooth, elegant roll, wearing a black dress, low heels, a pair of diamond earrings he’d given her for Christmas. She smelled amazing—a floral scent that lingered throughout their two-bedroom suite.

He was going to behave himself tonight. Absolutely.

But he was growing tired of the longing to have her in his bed, waking up to her every morning. The longing to make permanent what he felt in his heart.

He wanted RJ as his wife.

“I know, it’s amazing, isn’t it?” he said as they walked through the lobby. The checkered black and white travertine floors, the orange trees in planters that lined the room, the French revival style furniture, the three-Michelin star restaurant, and especially the courtyard garden. He’d been here once, long ago, with the daughter of the US Ambassador to Russia, and despite how that turned out, the place held romance in the air.

“It is—how did you know that Winchester Marshall would be here?” Ruby Jane tugged on his hand as they headed toward the crowd, pushing against a roped off red carpet that trekked from a hotel ballroom out to the street.

“Who?”

But one look at the massive movie poster that dangled over the beautiful century old doors, he could guess.

Winchester Marshall, actor, in his newest American spy flick. He played Jack Powers, a slick ex-CIA agent. York could admit, up on the wall like that, the guy looked impressive—dark hair, blue eyes, built. But probably that was all photo shopped and besides, the guy didn’t have the first clue what it took to really get into the spy game.

You didn’t end up with a pretty face, and an unadulterated smile. For a second, he was keenly aware of the scar that ran from his ear to his jaw.

And then, he shrugged it away. He wasn’t competing with this joker—

“Let’s see if we can see him.”

He looked at her. “RJ—”

She turned back. Cocked her head. “Yeah, you’re right. I’m being silly. It’s just that there’s lore in the family that he’s a distant cousin, so…” She lifted a shoulder.

“If you want to stay…”

“No. I want to go. I’m starved.”

He wrapped an arm around her neck and kissed her temple. “I have an amazing dinner planned.”

He’d ordered a car, but it took an extra tip to the doorman to get the car close enough—Marshall’s crowd clogged the street in front of the entrance, and in the end, they had to wait until the actor emerged—to a ridiculous amount of wild fanfare—and got in his limo before their Uber could pull up.

As it were, he and RJ got a glimpse of the man as he waved to the crowd. He looked every inch the man on his stupid poster, dark hair perfectly in place, a chiseled jaw, flashing blue eyes, and under that black tuxedo, a physique he’d earned in a gym.

Instead of the steely world of actual hard work.

“I’ll bet he’s on the way to his premiere,” RJ said. “I heard it’s an international tour. I can’t wait to see the movie. Brr. I’m cold. Are you cold?”

Actually, he’d broken a sweat, his other hand in his pocket, wrapped around the tiny velveteen box. The last thing he needed was a pickpocket.

They got into their Uber, he confirmed the address and then he sat back, his arm around RJ.

She fit perfectly against him.

He almost asked her right then, with the lights of Paris in her eyes. As they drove past the Champs-Elysees, then the Flame of Liberty Memorial—the statue that duplicated their own statue of liberty—and then across the river and toward the Eiffel Tower.

Lights glittered from the Eiffel Tower as twilight fell over the city. Romance, hope, their future seasoned in the summer air.

He didn't deserve the second chance, but he wasn't going to waste it.

"It's gorgeous," RJ said.

"Mmmhmm."

They got out at the park, and he took her hand, so as not to lose her in the maddening crowd that jammed the base of the tower. Apparently, dinner hour was the high time to visit the tower.

They headed to the south pillar entrance, to the private elevator there. Even here, a crowd pushed around the entrance. Cameras flashed.

He wove his way to the front, where a bouncer blocked the door.

"Hello," York said, and the man frowned, so he switched to French. "I have dinner reservations."

"Are you with Premier Events?"

Now York raised an eyebrow. "No. But I have a confirmation number." He reached for his phone to pull it up.

"Not tonight you don't," the man said. Not a big man, but he wore an air about him that suggested he didn't take much in the way of argument.

"Yes, tonight I do," York said and let go of RJ's hand to scroll through the phone.

Behind him, screams and cheers lifted off the crowd.

"He's here," RJ said, and York looked up from his scrolling through his emails to see, oh perfect, Winchester Marshall in the flesh parting the crowd, working his way to the door, waving, smiling, flanked by a couple security people and a few others in his entourage.

They reached the door, and the bouncer stepped in front of York to push him back as Marshall stood at the entrance, waved again, smiling that thousand-watt smile, and headed inside.

The door closed.

Oh.

What?

He turned back to his phone, did a quick search, and landed on an unopened email.

Dated two weeks ago.

He opened it, and his gut clenched.

"Did you find your reservation?" the bouncer asked.

York nodded, his jaw tight. "It's been canceled."

The man shrugged. "Tomorrow night, perhaps?"

Probably not. In the email it gave him an option to reschedule. Which he hadn't, of course.

He blew out a breath and another actor showed up and the crowd again erupted.

"That's Lincoln Cash," RJ said, even as she grabbed his arm and pulled him away from the entrance.

"Who?"

The man was tall—maybe 6'4", with blond hair, lines around his blue eyes, but still someone who looked like they should be on some Hollywood A-list.

“He was an actor, but quit and started directing. He’s done all the Jack Powers movies, and turned the franchise into more than just a spy movie, but really deepened the character, given him a story.”

Cheers as the man turned and waved to the crowd, like he might be a superhero.

“Let’s get out of here,” he said. “We need to find a place to eat.”

She looked over at him. “I’m sorry about the reservations.”

He lifted a shoulder. But this was their life, it seemed—too busy to catch up to their dreams, to grab a hold.

“I should have seen the email,” he said as they worked their way back to the street.

“We can find somewhere else.” She wove her fingers through his. “I thought I saw a French pizza place on our drive over.”

Perfect. Yes, that’s what he wanted—to propose over a pepperoni and mushroom pizza.

He sighed.

“Are you okay?”

Overhead, stars spilled out across the velvet sky, and fell upon the river, which lapped against the walkway. Lamps on the bridge had flickered on.

They passed other couples out for a stroll, families, a few people wandering alone, some focused on their phones.

In the distance, the city started to glow against the pane of night.

Maybe he should just take a breath. So the night hadn’t gone as he’d wanted. It could still be perfect, here, on the bridge, with the city of romance as a backdrop.

He turned to her.

The wind off the Seine had caught her hair, and a strand twined around her face. He caught it and tucked it behind her ear, let his fingers rest on her cheek. “You take my breath away.”

She blinked at him, smiled, her blue eyes deepening. “York. You’re such a romantic.”

He didn’t feel romantic. Most of the time his brain buzzed with what-ifs, his body strung with a sort of tension that he hadn’t been able to shake since marine boot-camp. The only time he remembered slowing down enough to breathe, to blink and sink into life had been when his memory went on hiatus for a month and he’d become Mack Jones, small town cook and bartender.

But even then, he’d gotten into a couple scuffles, and had saved his boss’s life by diving into a burning building, so he couldn’t really count that as, you know, slowing down.

Still, here, tonight, with just their future ahead of them, yes, he could let himself listen to his heart. Taste his dreams.

Grab the happy ending he’d been working for.

“You make it easy,” he said, leaning in and kissing her. She tasted of wholeness, of belonging, a familiarity and yet a passion in her touch that sparked desire deep in his core.

A hand on his chest made him pull away. Probably a good thing because his heart was hammering. She smiled up at him. “Again, I ask, are you okay?”

“Finally,” he said, and she frowned.

“It’s just been such a long…year. With the Jackson conspiracy and trial and…well, I finally get you to myself.”

“So that’s what this trip is about.” She pulled out her phone, and stepped up to him, turned her back to him. “Selfie in Paris.”

He smiled, something half-hearted, even as she grinned. She snapped the shot and then sent it somewhere. Maybe Facebook.

Then, she pocketed the phone, took a step close and slid her arms into his jacket, around him. “Here I am, all yours.”

All yours. Yes. He took a breath, stepped away and took her hands.

Now.

Yes. Under a perfect Paris night sky, with the wind stirring up the scent of summer flowers and that look in her eyes.

He started to kneel—

A scream ripped through the night.

RJ jerked away from him, turning, probably reflex.

He too stood up.

Another scream. It came from below the bridge, along the river walk and they pressed against the cement railing.

A woman and man had scooted down the bank and were reaching into the water toward—

“Is that a body?” RJ said.

York gave a grim nod.

“We should help.” And of course, she took off down the bridge.

Perfect.

He followed her down to the edge of the river where, by the time he arrived, a small crowd had gathered. Someone had dragged the body—a woman—to shore, turned her over and a man had started CPR.

There wasn’t a chance. She was already gray, and in a moment when the body refused to respond, he stopped.

Behind them, a siren whined, cutting through the night.

“How terrible,” RJ said, even as she vied for a better look. “I wonder if she jumped.”

Then, to his horror, she took out her phone and took a shot of the body.

“What. Are you. *Doing*?” He grabbed her back, even as the police agents came down the embankment.

“I…” She looked at him. “I don’t know. Habit?”

He sighed. As a former CIA analyst, those instincts were probably embedded in her.

Except, he wasn’t exactly muting the what-ifs that suddenly stirred in his brain. What if she jumped? What if she was pushed? Accident, suicide or…murder?

So maybe they both had a hard time shutting down their brains.

RJ wrinkled her nose at him. “Sorry.” She turned back to the scene, even as the agents pulled her further onto shore, told people to get back.

He glanced at the woman. Hard to tell her age, but maybe early forties, dark hair, and she wore dress pants and a blouse, as if she’d come from work. No shoes, but her feet were bare, so maybe she’d had on heels.

No visible marks, but that didn’t mean anything, really.

Stop.

The smell of the body rose and he grabbed RJ and pulled her away. Now his stomach soured, and so much for the romantic night.

“Pizza?” He helped her up the embankment.

“Sounds perfect.” She slipped her hand into his.

Not yet. But sometime in the next five days, it would be.

#

It would help if her brain didn’t latch onto every scenario and spin it out of control. Or if the

lights of Paris nightlife didn't spray into her room like neon. And of course, there was the memory of York, weirdly pensive and quiet as they'd eaten pizza at a quaint, delightful street cafe late in the night. The city buzzed around them, even at the late hour and with it her entire body.

RJ loved this life. Loved the fact that York had booked them this trip to Paris, and sure, he was right—they needed some breathing space after the last year investigating and shutting the case on former VP-elect Reba Jackson and her assassination plot against current President Isaac White.

But how did he expect her to simply…relax? They were in *La Ville Lumière* —the city of lights, of love, of spy novels and revolutionaries and history and…

Mystery.

No, sleep was for the dead. Or maybe a beach somewhere, but she wasn't going to miss one second of adventure in the exotic city of Paris. RJ got up and threw back the rose tapestry drapes. The view opened to a balcony that overlooked the cityscape.

The room was huge—a king size bed, a writing desk, a dresser, a spray of fresh red roses on the bureau. And dripping down from the ceiling, in the middle of an ornate medallion, the most gorgeous gold and crystal glass chandelier she'd ever seen. What York spent on their two-bedroom guest suite she didn't want to guess.

But she felt like Marie Antoinette, a little pampered by all this elegance.

In fact, deep in her heart, she hoped that York might be proposing. Of course, they'd talked about marriage—often, really. At least in the beginning, when they'd first moved to Shelly, Washington, where he'd lived as a man named Mack Jones.

She lived in a cute Victorian—he'd taken a flat over a bar and grill where he sometimes worked. Part of his small-town alias.

All the while, they sleuthed out the truth about Jackson, connecting her not only to a string of murders, but a dating service app that turned out to be a connection for hired assassins. And then, of course, she'd tried to bomb one of White's Inaugural Day parties.

They'd traced her dealings all the way back to a Russian connection with one Arkady Petrov, a hard-liner General who ran a branch of the Bratva, a man who wanted to reignite a cold war.

A cold war meant weapons, which meant money, and as a stockholder, Jackson was poised to make billions, even as she helmed the country as the first female president. And it had all been orchestrated by a man named Alan Martin, the same man who'd tried to kill York and left him for dead.

A man securely behind federal bars in Washington D.C.

So that had consumed most of their time and energy and after a few months, York had stopped talking about marriage.

Or maybe…

She drew in a breath, the air smelling of the city, a mix of bakery and cobblestone, the noise of the morning traffic stirring off the nearby street, even seven stories up.

What if he didn't want to get married anymore? What if he was happy with their, um, relationship?

What if he just wanted a partner, as in the work version? Despite the kiss he'd given her on the bridge—a kiss so thorough, so focused, maybe even vulnerable, that she thought, crazily, that he might be about to propose.

But then came the body, the pizza, a quiet walk home and he hadn't exactly made any extra moves last night when he bid her goodnight at her door.

Not that he would. Sure, he'd practically kidnapped her the first time he'd met her, but that had been to save her life. The man had always been nothing but…well, a gentleman.

Okay, sometimes he broke through that suave 007 veneer, but most of the time she felt his carefully banked passion.

But what if…what if that's all he wanted to give?

She closed her bathroom door and turned on the shower. He'd already lost a wife and a child. And his last girlfriend had been murdered—either by an assassin, or by a former CIA operative, a double agent co-worker.

She got in the shower.

So, yes, she got it—why he might be hesitant to step into something permanent, something that could eviscerate him if their work followed them home.

Ah, see, there went her imagination, working overtime. She was just seeing his face as he stared at that dead woman last night.

White. A little horror, and she'd instantly regretted following her curiosity down to the riverbank. No need to dig up reminders of the past.

No, she didn't want to ask for more if he wasn't ready to go there. She loved him enough to wait. And, in the meantime, to chase down adventure in Paris, or wherever it brought them.

She got out of the shower, toweled off and headed back out to the bedroom. Pulling on a sundress, she slipped into flats and simply tied up her damp hair. The hotel offered a wide array of tea, but despite York's palate she couldn't abide the stuff.

A quick scoot to the coffee shop down the street and she'd be right back.

She stepped out into the living area and cast a look over to York's closed door. Considered knocking. But maybe the guy needed his sleep. Maybe she'd score some croissants for breakfast while she was out and they could eat them on the balcony, at the cute bistro table.

She was in the lobby before she thought of her phone, still charging on the desk in her room. Oops.

The lobby was quiet at this early hour, the throngs from last night gone, just a few businessmen with roller bags or seated on the sofas with morning brews, reading their phones. A line extended from the hotel coffee shop.

She slipped outside, smiled at the doorman and headed down the street. A flock of pigeons scattered off the sidewalk, and a few scooters motored by. She'd spotted a bistro with a coffee cup etched on the window when they'd arrived yesterday, and now found the place half-full of morning customers, the seats outside occupied by people drinking their coffee. Most of them were glued to their phones, so she queued up behind a petite girl who had 'French' written all over her in her *haute couture* sun dress and heels. RJ felt like a hillbilly next to her.

Especially when a handsome man, dark hair, wearing a baseball cap and dark glasses queued up behind her. He didn't even look at her as she smiled at him, his attention on his phone.

American.

Another man—definitely American, by the look of his jeans, boots, aviator glasses and short clipped brown hair, slipped into the shop and got in line. He lifted his chin, nodding at her in acknowledgment before she turned back around.

Yikes. Apparently, she stood out.

The place smelled deliciously of dark roast coffee, and the floor squeaked appropriately as they moved forward. A few patrons sat in the leather chairs inside, but most took their brew outside in fat wide cups, some holding treats from the glass case.

She was eying a rather large chocolate croissant with her name on it when—bam! The man

behind her smacked into her. Flying forward, she slammed into the French girl, who then bumped the man in front of her, just retrieving his coffee.

The entire domino effect sent the coffee flying into the wait staff and across the counter.

Whoops.

Angry Parisian man rounded on fashionable Parisian girl who looked at RJ and rattled off something in furious French, and RJ could do nothing but to turn to the jerk behind her who—

Wait.

Winchester Marshall?

She froze, even as he made a face at her.

"Sorry. I thought you moved forward."

She gestured to the angry French people behind her, and he raised his hand. "Again, sorry."

The barrage of French continued and in a terrible second, a wait person rounded the end of the counter and suddenly, she found herself ousted from the café, tumbling out with the A-list actor on her heels.

"Huh." He stood there, surrounded by the clutter of patrons, who barely looked at him. "I didn't expect that."

"I'll bet not." She turned away from the café. "Now where am I going to get coffee?"

"There's another little shop down the street," he said. "I found it yesterday when this line was too long."

She looked at him. "I certainly hope you're buying, Bigfoot."

He stared at her. And then, a slow smile slipped up his face. He brought his glasses down. A beat passed between them.

"I guess I am." He put the glasses back on. "I'm—"

"I know who you are. But you probably don't know me. I'm Ruby Jane Marshall." She held out her hand.

He took it. "Marshall?"

"I think we're, um…okay, I know you probably get this a lot, but really, it's the truth—we're related. My father was Orrin Marshall."

He held her hand, nodding. "Wait—as in John and Orrin Marshall?"

"John was my father's brother, but yes…"

"My father, Patrick, is their cousin."

"Mmmhmm."

"So that makes us, what—?"

"Second cousins?" she said. They started walking down the street.

"Isn't that called kissing cousins?" He had a thousand-watt smile, and despite their family connection, he was utterly charming.

"Don't get any bright ideas there, superstar. I'm taken."

"Figures." But he laughed, and she did too.

They'd walked about a half block when in a passing window she spotted the man she'd seen in the coffee shop following them.

"You have a stalker," she said quietly.

He glanced over his shoulder, then laughed. "That's Lake. Personal security. My publicist insisted."

Personal security. Huh.

Here she was, with Winchester Marshall. Walking down the street with Winchester Marshall, second cousin, movie star—no, walking down a *Paris* street with Winchester Marshall, second

cousin, movie star, with *personal security*.

Yep, this was her life.

They passed planters overflowing with all color of pansies, historic buildings with dark mansard roofs that had probably housed some famous sculptor or painter. Past cafés with Parisians drinking coffee, eating croissants.

"So, you visiting, or—"

"Visiting. With my boyfriend. I'm from Montana, although, I currently live in Washington state."

"Huh. Me too. I have a ranch near Bozeman."

"Really? We live near Geraldine."

He glanced at her. "Really." They'd reached the café, and he held the door open for her.

This place had a different vibe, very trendy with the sounds of espresso shots being pulled pinging off the tile floor. Tall stainless-steel roasters in the back were cordoned off by glass. They parked themselves in the long line. "Maybe I should visit."

"Oh, you definitely should visit," she said.

"I grew up in Florida. We visited cousins in Minnesota once."

"Uncle John's kids. They're great."

He nodded. "Actually, their oldest, Fraser, and I kept in touch. Great guy. A SEAL."

"Former SEAL. But yeah."

"So, what do you do?" They had moved up in the line.

"I…um…I'm an analyst. I sleuth out possible threats for a private group." Really, she'd never quite figured out how to unpack what she did for the Caleb Group, a security task force formed by President Isaac White.

What she really wanted to do, however, was, well, this. Travel the world, track down evil and stop it.

"A 'three-letter' group?" He finger quoted the words.

"If you mean the CIA, then no." Or, at least not anymore.

He laughed. "Yeah. Even if you did, you couldn't tell me, right?"

She shook her head. "It's not exciting. I study reports and then write reports."

"Ah, the stock market. You're one of the smart ones."

Her face heated, but she nodded. Leave it at that, maybe.

"So, why did your boyfriend bring you to the city of loooove?" He raised an eyebrow.

Oh. They stepped up to the counter. "I'll have an Americano, and…" He looked at her, and now took down his glasses, and raised a handsome eyebrow.

"A latte."

"A latte." He peeled off the appropriate number of euros and they moved to the counter to wait.

"We just finished a big project and I think he wanted to celebrate. Actually, my, um, boyfriend had reservations at the Le Jules Verne last night. They got bumped for your private party."

He made a face. "Sorry."

"We ended up at this cute pizza place. It was fine."

"Still. The Jules Verne has a great view of the city. Tell him I'm sorry—and if there's anything I can do to make it up to him…"

The barista called their order and set their cups on the shelf.

Oops. Cute white ceramic *not* to-go cups. And next to the cups, a couple chocolate

croissants.

"Uh…oh…"

"I saw you eying them." He had tucked his glasses away and now gave her a wink.

Oh, he was a charmer.

"Mind if we eat outside?" He took the tray and carried it out to the street where he found a free table away from traffic and under an umbrella. He somehow squeezed that body into a chair, and she felt like paparazzi should show up, their lights flashing.

What. Ever.

"So, what's on your sight-seeing list?" He took his coffee and balanced it in his very big, capable, elegant hands.

"Um. I don't know. Versailles, I guess? And maybe the Louvre?"

"Only if you like thousands of sculptures of naked people."

She had picked up her cup, and now raised an eyebrow.

"The Louv-R is not G-rated." He said it with a pronounced R on the end.

Um.

"The first time I went, there was a crowd so thick around the Mona Lisa—which, by the way is about as big as an 8 x 10 picture—that I had to use binoculars to see it. Mind you, I was fifteen, but still. My mom just had to take us there. My dad called it the Louv-R, so it sorta stuck." He gave a shudder. "Talk about being deeply scarred. Not all those naked women should have their clothing off, if you know what I mean."

"There were different standards of beauty through the ages."

He put his cup down. "Couz, there's only one standard of beauty. And that's in the eyes of the beholder, right?"

She liked him. She'd seen a few interviews on television, and he'd always seemed funny. Sweet. But in the flesh, he was just a nice guy.

Who looked like the super spy he played in the movies.

She suppressed a chuckle, thinking about York and his opinion of the Jack Powers movies.

"What?" Winchester Marshall, The Beautiful said.

She made to open her mouth, closed it. Then, "Nothing."

"You were far away, thinking of something. What was it?"

She lifted a shoulder. "Just…I…let's just say that I know a guy who actually does…what Jack Powers does. And I wonder what he'd think about me sitting here with you."

"I hope that guy you know would think, hey, it's a family reunion. Nothing to see here."

She nodded. "Yep. Probably." Not even a little.

"So, your boyfriend is a spy, huh?"

She looked at him. "I didn't say that—"

"And you're here for some clandestine mission." He leaned forward, lowered his voice. "So, who are we staking out?"

"We're not—"

"How about that couple over there?" He nodded with his chin to a woman in heels, wearing a floral dress, and her counterpart, a man in skinny jeans and a button-down shirt. They wore sunglasses and drank their coffee in silence.

"Naw. They're just a couple trying to figure out how to ask for a divorce."

"Oh, maudlin, are we?"

She lifted a shoulder.

"Okay, maybe that's our target?" He pointed to a woman securing her bike to a post. She

wore skinny jeans, sandals, a backpack over her floral blouse.

"Courier. Not the package."

He made a face, lips drawn down. "Now we're getting somewhere." He turned to look at the crowd, then pointed to a man across the street. "What about him?"

He stood staring at the café, his dark glasses not betraying exactly at whom, but the moment RJ looked at him, a chill skittered through her. Sure, he was across traffic, but his build, that short dark hair, the way he just stood, staring at…wait, her?…

Alan Martin.

No. It couldn't be.

But he had the build, the short dark hair…the scar that traced his forehead.

Her breath caught.

"Are you okay?"

She looked down and found that she'd spilled coffee on her shirt. Now she set the cup on the table, her hands trembling.

Picked up a napkin and glanced back at the man.

Gone.

"You look like you saw, I dunno, an ex, walking with your best friend."

She looked at him. "I don't have exes."

"Lucky." But still he frowned. "And you're a little pale."

"I…It's been super great to meet you, Winchester—"

"Hey. Shh. First, it's Win, normally, but around here, right now, the name is Gaston."

She blinked at him. "Gaston?"

He raised a shoulder. "I liked the movie. And I use antlers in all of my decorating."

"Oh my gosh, you *are* a Marshall. That's something one of my stupid brothers—any one of the five of them would say."

He leaned back, put his arms behind his head. "What can I say? We Marshalls have to stick together."

"I gotta go. But, thanks, um, Gaston."

"You're welcome, Couz. And again, let your boyfriend know that I'm glad to make it up to him."

"Thanks." But her gaze went again to the space across the street.

Certainly, she had been seeing things. Alan Martin, double-agent, assassin and traitor did not escape, track her across the ocean only to plant himself outside an obscure coffee shop to watch her eat a croissant.

Speaking of, she wrapped it up even as she waved to Gaston and wove her way to the street.

Tried not to run back to the hotel.

Surely, dreaming. She'd just been caught up in the game she'd been playing.

With Winchester Marshall, movie star.

Maybe she was still asleep.

The elevator took a thousand years and finally she was back up on seven, headed down the hall—

The door opened just as she reached it.

York stood in the frame. He hadn't shaved, dark whiskers across his chin, and his hair was still adorably rumpled from sleep. He wore his dress pants from last night and had pulled on a tee-shirt, his phone and key card in one hand.

The other he used to grab her wrist and yank her inside.

Slammed the door behind her.

Then he pushed her against the door and kissed her. Something hard and quick and ooh, he was upset. Or, at least panicked.

Then he touched his forehead to hers and said quietly, “Where have you been?”

Oh, uh… “I….”

He leaned back, met her eyes. “I called and called only to discover—” He held up the cell phone.

Oh. Hers.

“I…went out for coffee. And croissants.” She held up her grease-stained napkin. The pastry had been a little flattened in all the ruckus. “I forgot my phone.”

He was breathing a little hard, those blue eyes still fixed on her. Then, he sighed and turned, walking away from her, all the way to the balcony doors.

“You okay? What’s going on?” She followed him, then put her hand to his back. Tight.

“Logan called.”

Logan Thorne. Their boss, director of the Caleb Group.

“And?”

York turned, and the look on his face sent a chill through her. “Alan Martin has escaped.”

She blinked, and suddenly, the room shifted. Her stomach clenched and she couldn’t breathe.

“RJ?” He grabbed her upper arm, and good thing because she just about toppled.

So. She wasn’t going crazy.

Shoot.

She met York’s eyes. “I know,” she said softly. “I saw him.”

Oh, I hope you enjoyed that! The adventure is just beginning!

Click here to check out the series!

And, thank you for reading!

XOXO!

Susie May