

Chapter 28: The Cafe

"Well well, the newbie is here just in time for the evening hour rush. Move fast, newbie."

Lena, the senior waitress winked at her as she passed by while rolling her eyes at the other waitress who was calling out to her. Dressed in a white t-shirt and blue jeans the dress code of the cafe, Nora quickly picked up the large tray with numerous glasses of coffee and rolled her eyes at the manager, "Look here, I am able to balance this tray without spilling a drop, that qualifies me to be taken off the newbie block."

The older woman tsked and added another glass of coffee to the tray, "Nope, you are a newbie until we have more new blood sign up. This is for table seven. Brace yourself they are caffeine addicts and regulars. Just pass the cups randomly and they will handle it themselves!"

From then on, it was a busy day for Nora who stayed on her feet the entire time, rushing around, getting orders and dodging runaway coffee cups. Lena and Maya, the two other women, continued to tease her and critique her technique throughout the shift, giving her no time to think about the assignment now hanging over her head like a sword.

Finally, as the evening rush quietened, Maya patted Nora on the back and sighed, "You are doing well for a rookie. I thought you had no experience."

"I've never worked for money, but sometimes I used to help out at a cafe near my old place."

"Ha! So you lied in the interview! We told you we wanted newbies, and you downplayed your experience so that you could get the job?"

Nora smiled awkwardly at that, unsure now if she was being scolded or teased. This was a feeling that she had come to experience a lot lately. It was because these people had accepted her into this role so easily. All her life, Sara had overshadowed her and only now did Nora realize that she'd been more affected than she realized.

While Nora tried to think what she should say, Lena interceded, "Come on, Maya. Don't tease the poor girl! We both know we needed someone experienced but couldn't afford them so naturally Nora is a God-sent."

"God-sent huh?" Maya repeated before shrugging her shoulders and patting Nora's shoulder, "Alright then, go take a coffee break miss God-sent."

Lena smiled approvingly at Maya while adding, "Take a muffin as well. On us!"

Nora looked at the two women gratefully and then almost ran to the backroom almost kicking off the high heels into the air. The only problem with working at this place was that her uniform insisted on her wearing high heels. And for someone like her who wasn't used to it, this was a punishment.

As Nora bit into the soft muffin, she looked through the student communities online trying to find someone who could coach her in mathematics, but it was all in vain.

Soon after the break was over, she went out and almost sighed to see a customer in her section of the cafe. She looked at the man and felt as if he had a familiar profile.

"The man wants the house special sweetheart. Here, take this croissant for him and tell him it is on us." Lena pushed the tray towards Nora who quickly took it and carried it for the man.

"This is not the place to be matchmaking, Lena." Maya pointed out archly as she checked the bills from the rush hour.

"Every place is a place for matchmaking, Maya. She is a young and good girl, working here to pay her tuition. If she had someone to take care of her, it would be good for her, wouldn't it? And I think the man has come here before."

"How do you know he has been here before? You wouldn't recognize someone's face if they pushed it in front of you!"

"Well, so what if I have face blindness? I can still recognize people, can't I? But anyway, this time I know because the man specifically asked me about the newbie. It is why I guided him to her section. And see, they are already chatting!"

As Nora placed the cup of coffee in front of the man, he looked up and she felt a flash of recognition. She knew the man! Or rather, she had seen him. Hoping against hope that he would not recognize her, she gave him a strained smile and placed the order, "The croissant is on the house, sir."

The man thanked her, and Nora thought she'd made a lucky escape when the man commented, "I hope your ex is still not pestering you."

Nora smiled at the man, reminding herself that it was not this man's fault that he was too curious. But even so, she answered, "No. Thankfully, he has left me to my own devices."

"Good, that is a good thing. Messy exes are always a problem. So, do you study in a university here..." The man left the question open, expecting Nora to complete the sentence and tell him which university she was studying in.

"Yes, yea. In a university here. Please let me know if you need anything."

"You." The man spoke a single word.

Wide-eyed, Nora looked at the man with astonishment, "Pardon?"

The man smiled and clarified himself, "Just wondering if you could sit here and chat with me while I finish this coffee. Chatting with a pretty girl while drinking coffee would be a pleasure."

"Umm. Sorry. I just took a break. Also, we are not allowed to sit with customers... So, I'm sorry, please enjoy your coffee."

Having said that, Nora made her quick escape. She did not understand why she felt the urge to stay away from this man. Maybe it was because of embarrassment that he'd heard the things that Antonio had told accused her of. Whatever it was, Nora felt that she should stay away and she was not about to ignore her instincts, no matter if the guy was handsome.

The man smiled as he watched Nora walk away from him. Hopefully, next time he would be able to chat with her for longer.