

I hailed the first cab I saw. I would be at least ten minutes late. I hoped Abrams would wait and not think I'd stood him up.

Mandalay was on Front Street, less than a twenty-minute ride from Old Slip. In the cab, I tried to calm myself. My entire body strummed with anticipation. I couldn't believe I was going to see Abrams again and hoped, deep down, I wouldn't be disappointed.

I'd built him up so much in my mind the idea of coming face-to-face with the real person versus what I've been imagining was jarring. But to him, what if I was an even bigger disappointment? But how could I be? It isn't as if he's expecting a version different from me – this was just me – the Chinese-American woman he'd met in the park under harrowing and fraught circumstances.

But what if I was reading all of this wrong and Abrams wanted to go out with me because he had a sick fetish thing for Asian women, where we weren't people, but some unreal fantasy culled from too much Anime or too many Manga magazines. To top it all off, I'd lied to my best friend over a man.

Okay, I'd have this one dinner with him. There wouldn't be anything in that; only a last-minute date probably never to be repeated. Loosha and I had canceled on each other for last-minute dates before; as a matter of fact, if one of us received a better offer, we'd take it and tell the other about it later. It was almost a rule with us. Got a hot date? Go for it. For one, we didn't get many of them, and I was asked out less than Loosha was so she'd understand and would wish me good luck. So then, why hadn't I just told her I was meeting Abrams for a drink? Why had I lied to her in the first place?

As the cab pulled up to the entrance of Mandalay, I put aside negative thoughts and got out. I glanced at the small plaque with the place's name etched discreetly into the dark wood. If you didn't know Mandalay was there, it was easy to overlook, and it was how the owners preferred it.

It was an English-styled pub that served a shortlist of English staples: beans-on-toast, fish and chips, and kidney pies, along with dark brews of Guinness, ales, and lagers. Yet, it was truly known for its cloistered atmosphere and lush privacy even when it was filled with people. Mandalay was a place where discreetness was served and appreciated.

Stepping inside, I stood for a few seconds allowing my eyes to adjust to its cool dimness. Looking around, I didn't see Abrams, so I moved further into the interior, which smelled of pork steaks, dark malts, and apples. The place was centered around a long, darkly burnished bar that seemed to go on forever. Bottles of all shapes and sizes sat behind the vast bar while leather-topped stools wreathed the rounded wood. Two men sat at the polished bar nursing high ball glasses of whiskey.

The only sounds were the low murmur of voices, muted laughter, and the clinking of glassware by those who sat at the few tables near the back and in the plush, red leather booths which ran along the walls.

There was still no sign of Abrams. Taking out my phone, I was only eight minutes late. Was he running late, too? Or had he shown up and assumed I had not? Or had he not shown at all?

I tapped his number and listened to it ring in my hand and in the room. A man appeared coming toward me. He held a phone in one hand and two empty long-stemmed wine glasses in the other.

As the man put the phone to his ear, he walked fully into the bar's subdued light, and looked right up at me. Abrams, at last. He stopped. He was wearing a cerulean blue shirt which deepened the richness of his black hair and dark eyes. There was love at first sight, no doubt about it.

Abrams spoke first, "I'm glad you came," his voice was low and smooth with a touch of an accent I hadn't noticed when we first met. "I went back for the wine glasses." He tipped his head toward the room, "Come on, Jesse let's sit down."

He led me to a booth with a reserved sign on the tabletop. I slid inside the booth, the cool leather surrounding me. Abrams slid in across from me, his body lithe and strong looking. His fine features were emphasized by a light tan, his smile wide and healthy. He was beautiful and sexy.

"You look wonderful," he said.

"You too. How'd you get my office number?"

"A couple of people on Rutherford's board were willing to trust me with it and the fact you're from Nantucket and live on Staten Island. I couldn't text you; I was running in between planes back to New York."

"I'm happy you made it back safely," I said, suddenly nervous now that we were together. "Of course, you did or you wouldn't be here...." I trailed off.

"True, and that's enough about me."

Abrams rested his forearms on the table, cupped his chin in one hand, and leaned slightly toward me, giving me his undivided attention.

"Tell me all about yourself, Jesse. Everything."

"Everything? That'll take about ten minutes."

"No ill effects from Friday?"

I shook my head, "A bad dream. A bad moment or two. But I'm alright now."

"Good, glad to hear it."

"I'm adopted," I said suddenly, baldly.

I'd tossed it out there, wanting to get it out of the way.

"Okay," he said slowly.

"From China. I was found in a basket from what I've been told; by the people at the orphanage. A man found me, and if he hadn't been sympathetic to my plight and taken me to their door, I would have died." Abrams didn't say anything, so I went on, "We're ubiquitous, don't you think? You see us all around, mostly girls, trailing after our adoptive families like what we are: yàzhōu xiǎo nǚ'ér."

"What does that mean?"

"Little Asian daughters; who in reality could be Korean, Vietnamese, Cambodian; though many of us came from China where adoption seemed as easy as buying puppies once upon a time."

After a few seconds, Abrams said quietly, "It's only a small part of you, Jesse. Of your story." His eyes held mine levelly, "I'm not interested in parts of you, but all of you. You're beautiful, you know."

"So are you."

"Uh, oh," Abrams sat back laughing. "You're confused and light-headed from hunger; I'd better get you something to eat. I brought a few delicacies back from France."