

DELETED SCENE – AMUSE BOUCHE – CHAPTER 1

The room was grand. Designed to impress. Romanesque columns of murky, indeterminable colour soared towards a domed ceiling. Masterful paintings struggled to assert their beauty against nature's own works of art displayed on the other side of a series of double-wide, double-high, windows. The house was dramatically perched at the edge of a deep river valley. Powerful spotlights highlighted a craggy drop, the river below and a stunning spruce-covered opposing bank. The sky was a canopy of black velvet. Inside a hundred twinkling pin lights descended from nowhere on invisible cords. The illusion was of early evening stars having somehow made their way indoors. Dozens of delicately scented candles, spread throughout the room, were the only other source of light. Sixty chairs, each draped with subtly tinted fabric and a spray of wildflowers, were neatly arranged in the center of the room.

Off to one side, a tuxedo-clad gentleman caressed the keys of a cranberry-hued grand. The music was melodic but subdued so as not to interfere with the chattering of the assembled guests. At 7:00 p.m. sharp the invitees settled into the chairs, primping, smoothing and rearranging. Fingers, ears and necks sparkled with diamonds, sapphires and precious metals. The air was heavy with the marriage of expensive colognes and perfumes.

It was time.

Minutes passed in anticipation and excitement and for some, burning curiosity. More minutes passed and still more until a first whispered exchange set off the entire

group. Eyes danced from the front of the room to the back. Something was not right. The room fell to a hush when finally their host appeared in the foreground.

Harold Chavell was a handsome man made of sharp edges, each profile a weathered map of age and experience. At forty-seven, he was a scion of all that was respected by men and admired by women. He stood tall at the front of the room, one hand covering the balled fist of the other. His crisp, white tuxedo was cream in the smooth candlelight. He was glad for the dimness that later would make it difficult for his guests to describe the look on his face. He hoped they wouldn't see the emotion, only the tight smile he usually reserved for unpleasant business matters.

He raised his hand to halt the music. All the better to hear the gasp when he said the words.

“There will be no ceremony this evening.”

Politeness kept the guests from asking why, but he told them anyway.

“It appears my groom has left me at the altar.”

DELETED SCENE – AMUSE BOUCHE – CHAPTER 9

To say that Anthony and Jared lived well was a vast understatement. With no college funds to save for or piano recitals to attend, this power couple had both the dollars and time to shop. And wherever they were in the world, it was one of their favourite things to do. They never allowed anything as trivial as location or size to influence a purchase decision. Ship, ship, ship. Anything could be arranged with the right credit card. As a result, the apartment they furnished on top of the Radisson Building, downtown Saskatoon, was a veritable museum of the finest the world had to offer the upscale yuppie. But my favourite room was dedicated to the “What was I thinking?” purchases. In it were the items that had arrived by crate from colourful ports all over the globe but in the light of day, away from the heady embrace of a foreign marketplace and local intoxicants, were discovered to be “oopses”. The Water Buffalo leather armchair from Thailand was an oops. The seven-foot wooden sculpture of a ridiculously evil looking, long beaked, half bird, half man from Indonesia was an oops. The hand-woven rug from a tiny merchant in Delhi, which didn’t show up for almost a year after purchase, with a label proclaiming “Made in Minnesota” and depicting a woman copulating with a goat was a particularly big, non-returnable oops. I think I liked this room because, on occasion when I was in doubt, I could spend some time there and remember that these two men were indeed as human and fallible as the rest of us. And their willingness to display these shopping “horrors” reflected their ability to laugh at themselves. This was good. Because sometimes they seemed so perfect I wanted to dump marinara sauce on their white couches. Childish? Perhaps.

