

In this prologue, the reader joins Chas as she spends her final hours in Paris. In “Last Stop...Dupont Circle”, the reader comes to find that Chas was going through some major storms. Seeking peace and refuge, she jet sets to Paris and hopes to just simply find her bearings through it all. The reader will find that Chas spends a decent amount of time analyzing her life, but making sure not to cross that line of wallowing in self-pity. She also refuses to spend time blaming others for her current situation. While naturally, blame can typically be shared by multiple parties in certain situations, Chas sees the importance in correcting her wrongs. Her perspective was confirmed after she so happened to come up on The Church of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, Paris’s oldest church. After spending some much-needed time there, she left lighter than when she came and prepared for her flight back home where she had more than her fair share of problems to face. Little did she know, her time spent in that age-old church as well as those moments after, would be her first step towards doing what she had neglected to do for the past few years: live in her moments.

Paris. The City of Lights, Love and Life. Corner bistros, flower carts and world-acclaimed artwork are just a few of the things that account for the easy reasons to fall in love with this place. Even the coldest nights can be warmed by the beautiful bells of Notre Dame or the melodies of a musician’s cello by the Seine under the stars. After spending two weeks here just to clear my head, one would think I would be content in my overly-active life that just so happened to be missing love. If you even step foot here, you’re bound to have a beautiful love story no matter your history, right? As much as I wanted to believe in love finding me one day, I just couldn’t. I wasn’t in a place of not knowing my worth; I just believed that love would not happen to me at this point. Just a few years before, I practically lived here with the love of my life and we all but crashed and burned. Or maybe we actually did crash and burn after the breakup-just unknown to the other. I knew little about his “post-us” situation because I wasn’t in a place to reach out. Saying that makes me realize how much a person will believe their own lies. It actually wasn’t that I lacked the strength to seek my truths; it was the fact that I would have to make myself vulnerable and put down my pride to acknowledge my pain. I loved Matthew and at the time, I would have given anything for us to work out. I just didn’t know how to tell him that but he should have known that, right? After thinking about it, no, he shouldn’t have; I left before he even could digest what happened. The funny thing is while I processed what love had meant to me over the past few years, the feeling of disappointment surrounded me just like I relived every ounce of heartbreak within that moment. This feeling had nothing to do with him, but everything to do with me and the many short comings I apparently needed to work on so I didn’t repeat my past. As I sat in a church earlier today, I saw people preparing for a wedding. Even in church, the devil can sneak up on you and for a moment I envied the bride, whomever she may have been. Then I remembered what’s for me will be for me and if I don’t currently have it, it’s because each day is a step towards necessary preparation. I decided to pray for the first time in a while. I prayed to have a forgiving heart towards those who had hurt me. I prayed to have another chance at love and the discernment on how not to screw it up. And lastly, I prayed for closure. I know that is not on the other person- I used to think it was, but I was wrong. It’s on me, so I won’t turn around and look down my past for answers. This is not a task for those who no longer hold a certain relevance in my

life. I promised myself in that very moment, on this very day, that I would look for everything I need within me after first praying to Him.

Fast-forward a few hours later, I was working on my second cappuccino at a bistro a block away from my parent's condo. I didn't need the caffeine and actually, I probably should have been in bed because of how exhausted I was. My earlier flight was delayed due to the weather, so I decided to kill a little time at my favorite bistro. This certainly put a wrinkle in my travel plans, but I had no one to rush home to, so what was an extra few hours for me in the most beautiful city in the world? Just then I caught the Iron Lady's lightshow and it was simply breathtaking. For that moment, Paris stopped and she was the only thing that mattered. While only a minute long, I would remember that moment for the rest of my life. There is just some beauty that can't be captured by a lens.

"Beautiful." My thoughts were interrupted by the voice of a stranger sitting at the table next to me. Looking at him made me want to extend my trip for another week, but did I really need those problems? I just promised God not to do anything without His permission; but He put him here, so I am completely blameless on this one.

"Excuse me?"

"The Eiffel Tower. For a few moments, the most beautiful structure in Europe commands the attention of all in Paris." I knew when a man was fishing, but it was my last night here and feeling like I needed a confidence booster, I didn't mind the flirt. Actually, I decided to partake.

"All of Paris?"

"Well, tonight, she might have a contender...Mrs.?" See. I knew it was coming. I guess he thought his attempt to shake my hand would cover that up, so I played along and extended mine.

"Ms. Chassidy."

"Just a first name?"

"Well that's more than I know about you."

"You didn't ask." A bit of a smartass, he was already winning because I was genuinely smiling. "You're right, how rude of me. Whom do I owe the pleasure?"

"I would refer to them as my employer, but you can call me David." He had a great sense of humor and he managed to get both a laugh and a smile out of me. The past few weeks made doing either incredibly hard. I was never one to be an open target for a superficial conversation, but it was something about his aura that made me think we were right where we were supposed to be.

"Did they leave you stranded?"

"Desolate. I didn't know what to do with myself, so I did some therapy shopping in the First Arrondissement."

"Looking at your bags, I can't see a place you missed. I hope you have your own overhead."

"I might."

"Well, you seem to be absolutely charming, but before I'm further delayed getting back to DC, I need to get to get to the airport."

"What time? I leave out in a few hours as well to return to New York. You are more than welcome to share my car with me." I loved how he assumed I wanted to ride with him, but really I wanted to enjoy my last few hours in Paris with my thoughts. I can't say I wasn't

intrigued and especially because he lived fairly close to me. What's an hour long flight for the weekend?

"That's very kind of you to offer, but not this time. Besides, my flight is very early and..."

"And excuses come easy for you." Did he just try me! While unexpected, I didn't flinch—probably because of the wine I had before the cappuccino. I guess he thought I was going to change my mind after his ineffective attempt at reverse psychology, but I didn't.

"Before I was cut off, I was going to say I really want my last few hours to be with just Paris. I don't come here as often as I would like, so I truly cherish my time here. And besides, you weren't the only one who went shopping while you were here. I'm sure we will both need our space."

"Fair. Maybe after we have been home long enough to unpack our vanities, we can intentionally meet for dinner."

"Are you asking me?"

"I didn't, but I am. May I come see you in DC or can I take you to my favorite places in New York?"

"Actually, you can take me to my favorite places in New York."

"Ah, touché. Well, Madame, I've made my driver wait on me long enough tonight. It has been a pleasure, but I need to sleep, pack and give myself some time to get to the airport. In case you want to make some random New Yorker smile, give me a call."

"People smile in New York?"

"Depends on the stock market." I laughed, but I had to cut the banter short.

"Safe flight and thank you for your conversation, David."

"My pleasure, Ms. Chassidy. Good night."

"Bonne nuit." He left his card on the table before retreating into his SUV with no less than ten half-full shopping bags. Extremely tall and handsome, his dark skin and well-sculpted body seemed to fit corporate America well. Judging by his Senior Vice-President title for a prominent law firm on both coasts, I wasn't far off. His cologne lingered and I loved everything about his sense of fashion; but I was convinced it would never work. He'd require way too much space in the closet and probably would be that guy to take hour long showers, too. Absolutely a deal breaker. As I politely called for my check, I was in for a surprise.

"Madame, the gentleman already took care of your bill."

"Who?" It may have seemed like a silly question, but David left when we said goodbye and got into his vehicle. His check was still on the table with his payment.

"The gentleman you were speaking to a few moments ago. He actually called the manager and took care of your bill with us. All is well."

"O, wow. That's...that's sweet...and slightly ambitious! I'll have to reach out and say thank you to him."

"You should. He's one of our favorite customers and a wonderful person. Good people know good people. Bonne nuit, Madame."

"Bonne nuit." As he gathered my cup and saucer, I smiled. Not because I expected my tab to be covered, but because I didn't expect David. Favorite customer? How often was he here? That would definitely come up in our next conversation. As I walked back to my condo, I smiled. While a tad arrogant, I couldn't help but imagine how much fun he might actually be. A part of me wasn't really sure how to feel about even speculating anything about him because I

would be completely overtaken with life upon my return back home. But then there was the hopeless romantic part of me who absolutely couldn't wait to see him again. Before walking through the gate, I took one last look at that beautiful tower and the timing must have been perfect because seconds later, the lights on the Eiffel Tower were turned off, as if Paris was saying good-bye for now. I smiled, walked upstairs and fell asleep to the sounds of French instrumentals.

Seven hours and 5 ridiculously-filled bags later, I was well-rested and out the door with my new YSL on my shoulder. As the driver loaded my things, I took one last look at the city and promised her the next time I returned, I wouldn't be so broken. I had nothing but happy memories in this city, but this trip was the exception. I had to admit, however, while I was not leaving happy, I was leaving somewhat healed. I must have immediately fallen asleep on the way because when I woke up, we were already at the airport. Once I checked in, I decided to grab a bite to eat. I wanted to do a lite dish to go, so I ordered a bruschetta. My pilot was running a little behind schedule, so I decided to get something decent to snack on while I waited. While I was waiting, I decided to catch up on the news. I asked the bartender to change the channel for me, but apparently a fellow patron had a problem with my request.

"So, you turn down my offer and you take control of the only flat screen? I think we would call you rude back in the South." I smiled before turning to a familiar voice.

"And I would call you entitled for thinking that I had to accept your offer if I, quite frankly, didn't want to." David was getting his shots in early, but I don't think he expected the backfire.

"Ouch! Are you always this sharp in the morning?"

"You have no idea. Glad you made it safely."

"You as well. Care to join me for a quick breakfast bagel?"

"As tempting as that sounds, I gotta run. My pilot should be here in a few minutes and as you know, I have a very long ride back to the states."

"Bruchetta, madame!" The bartender kindly brought over my order with enough plastic ware and napkins for ten people. I paid my tab and threw in a few extra euros in for David's coffee.

"Thank you so much. Please keep the change and cover his drink."

"Merci!" The bartender walked off before David could tell him otherwise.

"Thank you, but that was unnecessary."

"Well, now we're even."

"O you're the type who doesn't accept gifts well I see."

"O, I accept them very well, just not from strangers. It's a Libra thing."

"I know all about those."

"Sounds stereotypical or is it from experience?"

"Definitely experience."

"Really when is your birthday?"

"I'll tell you over dinner, but for now I have to go before I get left again. Apparently, we will have a layover in D.C. You should meet me for breakfast if you are up to it. If not, I'll wait for your call when you're in town and we can go to dinner."

"How do you know I am calling you for dinner?"

"Why do you think you're not?" I don't know why, but this man somehow made it under

my skin and it wasn't even 8 o'clock yet. I don't know if I needed coffee or I was just pissed it was time for me to go back home. Thinking about it, it was probably a bit of both.

"Goodbye, David."

"See you soon, Chassidy."

After doing a quick make-up check in the bathroom, I walked to my gate. I normally flew commercial, but being that I needed to get away as quickly as possible, I scheduled a jet. The ride over only had one other person, but I stayed in my suite. This enabled me to cry as much as I needed to for nine hours and not be bothered by either people asking if I was alright or me pretending like everything was fine. I never did anything to treat myself, so I didn't mind the splurge and considering how insanely fucked up my Christmas was, I deserved it. There should only be one other person on this flight according to the concierge, so I expected it to be just as quiet.

"Now you're starting to scare me." What the hell! Of all the gates in this airport, how is he close to mine?

"This is my gate. What are you doing here?"

"Catching my flight. My assistant booked a private charter to hurry and get me back. Apparently no one was flying to New York today on our preferred charter, so she elected this one. I guess you're the reason we have to stop in D.C. first. It's fine long as I still have my own overhead bin. Hopefully, by the time I get back to the states I'll have one more reason to sing her praises...and not fire her."

"If you're anything like I can only imagine, I'm sure she wouldn't mind."

"Now that hurt."

"You have a heart?"

"Bigger than yours. Let me be a gentleman and get your bag."

"It's not heavy at all, but thank you."

"You just refuse help, don't you?"

"Does it bother you?"

"To see a lady carry a bag half her size when I have hardly anything, yes it does. I'm from the south and my mother raised me right and my father was the reinforcer. Bag, please."

"Fine, take the bag." This was unbelievable. At this point, I'm convinced someone had it in for me. Not that I didn't appreciate the company nor him being a gentleman, but I needed this time to decompress. I don't think that was going to happen with this man on my flight. Not mentally anyway. He was one of the most beautiful men I had ever seen, but at this point in life, I have learned those are nothing but trouble and I wasn't looking for any! As we walked closer to the gate, I caught him smiling in my direction, but he didn't care that I noticed. It felt nice to share the ride with someone I was already intrigued by genuinely. He just wouldn't know that. We couldn't all fit on the plane if his ego was triggered.

"Good morning! We are so glad to have you both. We can go ahead and board so we can get you guys back home soon as possible. Do either of you need any assistance with loading?"

"No ma'am, thank you." At least he has manners.

"No, he took my things." He shot me a look, but I made sure to avoid eye contact.

"Perfect, I will let your pilot know that you both are ready."

"Looks like we'll be having breakfast after all."

"This is not a date and I paid for my ticket."

"I can refund you. Did you have the chicken or the steak?"

I rolled my eyes and walked down the bridge. The pilot greeted us and once inside we were met with breakfast pastries, juices as well as French-pressed coffee. I had my bruschetta, but the pastries looked too good to be left alone, so I took one...or two and headed to my suite. I wasn't being anti-social, but it was early and I just wasn't morning person.

"You turning in for some sleep?" He sounded like my parole officer rather than a fellow passenger.

"Yes, would you like for me to wear an ankle bracelet so you can track me at all times?"

"No, I'll take your word. I don't really get the vibe that you wouldn't stay on the plane once we're airborne. Enjoy your rest."

"Thank you." If he was single, it wouldn't surprise me one bit. Minutes after settling in, we ascended into a nearly cloudless, sun-kissed sky. Paris had never looked so beautiful and I had never been so sad to leave her. At that moment, there was a knock on my suite. I prayed it wasn't David. I didn't have it in me.

"Ms. Khanna, can I get you anything?" It was Karen, my personal concierge during the flight.

"Just a eucalyptus eye patch, an omelet with steak and cheese and a Macallan Fine Oak-10 years, please. Actually just bring the bottle." She looked alarmed, but I didn't blink.

"Chaser?"

"I apparently already have one, thank you."

She didn't get my sarcasm, but it wasn't meant for her to understand. Truth be told, David's demeanor was right up my alley. I would have enjoyed conversing with him the entire flight, but I really had things to tend to back home and that had my attention, not him. Honestly, I felt depression setting back in and that's not at all what I was going for as a parting gift from France. I wouldn't mind a quick trip to New York, but I had business to take care of first. Returning to D.C. to face my problems was so unappealing. I didn't come to Paris to run from them, but I needed to breathe and absorb my new reality. Over the next 9 hours, I had to devise a plan to fight like hell for what was mine.

-Chas,
The Prologue
"Last Stop...Dupont Circle"