



**A
SHORT
STORY**

**THE
HOUSEMAID'S
WEDDING**

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

FREIDA MCFADDEN

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A SHORT STORY

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*This one is for all my readers.
Somehow, you got me to write four of these.*

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

I wrote *The Housemaid's Wedding* as a short story to fill in the long gap between Book 2 of the Housemaid series (*The Housemaid's Secret*) and Book 3 (*The Housemaid is Watching*). I was worried the readers might feel cheated that they never got to see Millie and Enzo tie the knot, so here it is! It can be read either between Book 2 and Book 3, or after Book 3.

PROLOGUE

THIS MAN IS GOING TO KILL ME.

There is murder in his eyes. I've seen enough in my lifetime to recognize the danger that I'm in. This man will not wait for an explanation. He will not even allow me a split second to catch my breath. He will *end* me.

It's just the two of us in this stifling, claustrophobic space. He made certain of that—he stalked me and waited until the moment I was alone, then he locked the door behind us. Now here we are.

And he can do whatever he wants to me. Nobody knows I'm here.

My nose is bruised, possibly broken. Blood streams from my nostrils in warm rivulets, dripping down my lips. It tastes metallic. Slamming his fist into my nose is one of the first things he did to me, before even saying hello. It was his way of letting me know he means business.

“I will break every single bone in your body,” he hisses at me.

He means it. Oh God, he *definitely* means it.

I never thought my day would end up this way. If I had known—if I had any idea at all what this man would do to me—I would have made very different decisions this morning. I thought I could handle this, but from the beginning, I was in over my head. I had no idea.

It's my fault I'm here. I made a terrible mistake.

And now it's too late.

“I’M GOING TO CUT YOUR THROAT, MILLIE CALLOWAY.”

Those words are *not* how you want to be woken up first thing in the morning.

But here I am, groggy from the deep, dream-filled sleep that I was wrenched from by this early-morning phone call. I’m holding the phone to my ear, wondering if the harsh whispered threat I just heard was part of a dream I was still having. After all, who gets woken up by somebody promising to cut their throat?

Well, me, apparently.

“Excuse me?” I say into the phone, my voice still scratchy with sleep.

I roll over in bed to prop myself on my side, rubbing my eyes to wake myself up. Maybe I heard them wrong. Maybe instead of cutting my throat, the stranger on the other end of the line actually wants to cut the costs of my car insurance.

“You heard me,” the male voice growls, his voice low and ominous. “You stuck your nose in the *wrong* place, and now you’re going to pay the price.” A brief pause follows for me to absorb this new piece of information, and then:

“I’m going to kill you slowly and painfully, Millie Calloway.”

Nope, not a dream. This is most definitely real and clearly meant for me, as evidenced by the repeated use of my full name. I can't pretend this is some sort of wrong number or spam call. But it's not the first death threat I have received, and it won't be the last.

I'm not thrilled about the fact that it arrived on my wedding day, though.

They say rain on your wedding day is good luck. Death threats on your wedding day? Probably not so much. Still, I know exactly how to deal with this asshole.

"Go to hell," I reply calmly, then I jam my thumb into the red button on the screen to end the call.

I toss my phone back onto the nightstand, where it has spent the evening charging, next to the mouth guard that is supposed to keep me from grinding my teeth at night, if I could ever remember to pop it in before bedtime. I refuse to let that call get to me. I have a tendency to do things that piss people off, and occasional death threats are to be expected, but they have never proven to be more than empty words. It's something I've grown used to.

I will *not* let it ruin this day.

I roll my head to look over at my fiancé, who is stirring beside me. Enzo might have been awakened by the ringing of my phone, but thank God, he did not hear what that jerk said to me. If he got any inkling that somebody was threatening me, he would've been furious. He would have tried to make a big deal out of it—maybe even suggested going to the *police*—and that's the last thing I want today. Like I said, it was surely just empty words.

Today will not be about some insecure asshole. Today is going to be about me and Enzo becoming husband and wife.

"Millie?" he murmurs, his Italian-accented voice thick with sleep. "Who was on the phone?"

"Telemarketer," I lie.

He grimaces because he hates calls from telemarketers. He would've hated the actual call even more, but he's never going to find out about it. If it happens again, I'll have to tell him eventually, but not today.

Enzo rubs his eyes as he struggles into a sitting position. His black hair is sticking up, and he's got a day's worth of stubble on his jaw, but my fiancé is at his sexiest first thing in the morning. And that's saying a *lot* because his baseline level of sexiness is quite high. Then the covers fall away to reveal the taut muscles in his chest, and I forget all about that stupid call.

In only four short hours, this man is going to be my husband. My *husband*. We're going to be married, with rings and everything. Despite the fact that we've been a couple for a long time and been through hell together, I never entirely believed this day would ever come.

I place a hand gently on the swell of my abdomen. Try as I might, I can't forget that *this* is why we're getting married. When he popped the question, Enzo made a whole speech about how he knew from the second he met me that I was the one and how he wanted to spend his whole life devoted to me, but he proposed *one week* after I told him I was pregnant. The timing was unmistakable.

"How are you feeling?" He has noticed me touching my belly, and his brow creases in concern. "Still with the nausea?"

Enzo was a rock star during my horrific bout of first-trimester nausea. He bought me three forms of ginger, which sadly only confirmed three times that I hate ginger. He bought a diffuser because he read aromatherapy can work, but it did not. He even read a book about acupressure and gave me a personal session, which resulted in a sexy outcome that admittedly *did* help me forget about my nausea for a little while. But nothing worked. Until about a month ago, I was throwing up every day. Sometimes multiple times a day. It wasn't fun.

But it's like they say—what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. If I can deal with twice-daily vomiting, I can deal with some chickenshit asshole threatening me on the phone.

Besides, I know who that guy is. Okay, I might not know his name, but over the last several years, I have helped quite a few women escape their abusive husbands. In the process, I have gained some enemies in the form of

angry husbands. I don't know which of those husbands was threatening to slit my throat, but it was almost certainly one of them.

"I'm fine." I manage a smile that initially feels forced, but when I see the smile on his own lips, it becomes genuine. "I'm just excited about today."

"Me too." He reaches for me, pulling me into his bare arms and drawing me close. "I can't wait to marry you."

When he says those words, I feel—dare I say it?—*lucky*. I've never felt lucky in my whole life—it's not a word I'd ever have used to describe myself. But at this moment, I feel like the luckiest woman in the world.

Okay, nothing about this wedding is conventional. It's not going to be a big ceremony—we will get married at Manhattan's City Hall in a tiny chapel that I've read is more like a conference room with a few decorations. Also, there's that whole part about me being knocked up. But who cares? What matters is that the two of us are going to spend the rest of our lives together, and there's no one else I would rather share that journey with.

Also, there's one more thing that will make this day special.

“MILLIE?” ENZO SPEAKS THE WORD INTO MY HAIR AS HE CUDDLES CLOSE to me in bed. “Is sex on the morning of the wedding bad luck?”

Good question. As badly as I want the answer to be no, I am desperate for my run of good luck to continue.

“Probably,” I admit.

His face falls. “You are sure?”

“You know,” I say, “we’re not even supposed to *see* each other today.”

“Really?” Enzo looks around our tiny living space, clearly confused. We occupy a small one-bedroom apartment in the Bronx, where the living room and the kitchen are merged into one. “Where am I supposed to go to not see you?”

“It’s more of a rule for fancy people who have friends with guest bedrooms where they can spend the night.”

“I hate fancy people.” He kisses my neck, which makes my whole body tingle. “So since we *already* broke rules, it is not bad to break more, yes?”

Bad luck or not, on any other day, I would be powerless to resist him. But today is my wedding day. I have to shower and make sure my dress fits well and get my hair looking respectable and put on more makeup than my usual dash of drugstore lipstick. It takes all my self-restraint to push him away. “Better not. I need to get ready.”

“Get ready?” He looks baffled. “But our wedding is not for four hours!”

“Right. It’s in *only four hours*.”

Enzo is frowning, but he reluctantly relinquishes his grasp on me so that I can go to the bathroom and have a shower. Men just don’t get it. I had to iron the white shirt he’ll be wearing today because such a thing didn’t even occur to him, despite the fact that it was *clearly* unacceptably wrinkled. He will shower in five minutes, towel off his hair, throw on his suit, and the whole thing will be done in less than ten minutes.

But I need to look perfect today. Because there’s one other thing that will make this day incredibly special.

My *parents* are coming to the wedding.

This is a *really* big deal. My parents and I are not close. In fact, I haven’t seen them in well over a decade. They abandoned me in my time of need back when I was a teenager, when I defended my best friend from being attacked and ended up in prison for killing the bastard. They threw me to the wolves—didn’t give me a penny for my defense and never came to visit me when I was locked away. And even after all that, I was willing to forgive and forget—they are my parents, after all—but they were not. *You’re a bad apple, Millie. We don’t want you poisoning our lives anymore.*

Do you know what it feels like for your parents to call you a poisoned apple? It doesn’t feel great. Yet, no matter how much they pushed me away, I still craved their support. I loved them, and more than anything, I wanted them to see I had changed from the girl I used to be.

I had been worried I’d never see them again. And I was sad that since Enzo’s entire family is either deceased or back in Sicily, he would have no family members at our wedding. I told this to Enzo one night, not long after his proposal. He was the one who convinced me to call them to let them know about the wedding and the baby.

My mother did not sound excited when she realized I was on the other end of the line. At first, I thought she might hang up on me. But then when I told her I was trying to get my degree in social work, she thawed considerably. She wasn’t thrilled to hear I was pregnant out of wedlock, but

she was glad to know that I'd soon be marrying the father of the baby. And when I extended a wedding invitation, she told me she would be there. My parents will be our only guests at our wedding—the only witnesses to our holy matrimony.

I'm so nervous about seeing them again after all this time. I'm scared I'll say the wrong words and screw things up all over again. But I'm also excited. I love my parents, and I always hoped that they would forgive me for my sins of the past, especially since I honestly don't think they were such grievous sins.

And no, this isn't exactly how I dreamed my wedding would be when I was a little girl, but I want it to be as perfect as it possibly can be. We've already started the day with a death threat, so we have a lot of ground to make up.

I roll out of bed, tugging on my oversized T-shirt, which is feeling decidedly less oversized lately. Before hitting the bathroom, I walk over to the window to discover snowflakes have started to fall from the sky. It's only the beginning of December, and the weather forecast didn't predict snow, but it's coming down fast enough to stick to the ground.

Is snow on your wedding day good luck? Or is only rain? Or is rain just *ironic*?

Enzo yawns, still in the bed. "Hey," he says, "how about Felicity?"

"Felicity?" I repeat.

"What is wrong with Felicity?"

I shrug. "I don't know. It's just not my favorite name in the whole world."

"Okay, then you tell me, what is your favorite name in the whole world?"

Ever since we found out at our last OB/GYN appointment that we're having a baby girl, we have at least three conversations every day about baby names. Or more accurately, we have at least three conversations every day where one of us suggests a baby name and the other explains why it sucks. Presumably, we will manage to agree on something in the next four months, or else our baby girl will go through life nameless.

“Let’s put a pin in the baby name discussion for now,” I say. “I need to take a shower.”

“But I like Felicity.”

“Yeah, well, *I* liked Nadine.”

Enzo makes a face. “Okay. We put the pin in for now.”

I’m about to head into the bathroom to shower when my phone starts ringing again. Enzo glances at it and starts to pick it up for me, but I make a mad dash across the room to snatch it up before he can.

When I get a look at the screen, I’m glad I didn’t let Enzo answer the call. The 718 number flashing is unfamiliar, and I’m almost positive it’s the same number that woke me up this morning. I send the call to voicemail. I’m not in the mood for another death threat.

“Spam again,” I say.

He nods sympathetically but doesn’t ask any questions. And he has a right to ask questions, especially when I take the phone with me into the bathroom for my shower, but he keeps his mouth shut. It’s a weird thing to do, but I can’t risk him picking up and hearing that voice telling me he’s going to cut my throat. Enzo will lose his *mind* if he hears that—he will not just shrug it off and go about his day.

I’ll tell him all about it—tomorrow.

I take a quick shower, noticing that my belly has popped out a lot more in the last week. A month ago, you couldn’t tell I was pregnant at all, even without any clothes on. At worst, it looked like I had a food baby. But it’s becoming increasingly obvious that something is growing inside me.

My baby.

Little Nadine.

Or not. But definitely not Felicity.

After I finish my shower, I leave the bathroom, wrapped in a skimpy towel. Enzo is still in bed, scrolling on his phone as I make my way to the closet, where my wedding dress is hung up inside.

As we are not having a traditional wedding, I do not have a traditional wedding dress. First of all, it’s not white. I *hate* that color, and not only that,

it seems wildly inappropriate given my... situation. So a few weeks ago, I went to Macy's and purchased an A-line silhouette powder-blue dress with lace sleeves. It was marked down from nearly three hundred dollars to just over one hundred, which was barely in our budget, but I bought it anyway, because, for God's sake, it's our wedding. Plus, the dress can serve as both my "something new" and my "something blue."

It also has a scoop neck, which will be perfect to show off my "something old," which will be a gold locket necklace that my mother is bringing me. The necklace is an heirloom passed down from her mother, and her mother before her. Honestly, I never thought she would ever pass that necklace on to me. And it means much more that I'll be receiving it on my wedding day.

"You're not supposed to see me in this dress." I cast a worried look at Enzo. "It's bad luck."

"I'm not supposed to see you at all," he reminds me. "Anyway, I saw it already. Remember? You did fashion show when you came home."

"Oh, right." That makes me feel a little better. "I guess I should stop being so superstitious."

He grins at me. "It is cute. Anyway, this is your wedding day. You are allowed to be *pazza*."

He has used that word multiple times to refer to me. I haven't looked it up because I'm not sure I want to know. I don't think it's a compliment, but I let it slide.

The towel falls from my body, and Enzo lets out an appreciative whistle. I take the blue dress off the hanger and slide my legs into the silky fabric. I purchased a brand-new pair of pantyhose just for today, and then an extra pair in case I get a rip. I have thought of everything. I am prepared for any emergency. Today is going to be perfect.

Except...

Oh no. This stupid dress doesn't zip up anymore!

“WHAT IS WRONG?”

Enzo looks at me with concern as I struggle with the zipper in the back of the blue dress. I tried the dress on only one week ago, and it was fine. It fit *perfectly*. So why am I struggling now?

“Can you zip me up?” I ask him.

He jumps off the bed, eager to help. He’s wearing only a pair of boxers, and it distracts me for a moment from my distress about the zipper, but then he is behind me, and the distraction is gone. His fingers linger on the small of my back.

“Last chance for sexy time,” he breathes in my ear.

I’m a little tempted, but I shake my head. “Just zip up the dress.”

That’s when things get real. Enzo tries his best, bless his heart. He struggles to pull up the zipper without ripping the fabric, but nothing is happening. It’s not budging. Over the last week, my stomach has grown to the point where this dress no longer fits.

“I am sorry.” He lowers his hands in defeat. “It does not go.”

I bury my face in my palms and sink down onto our bed. “Oh my God, what am I going to do?”

He frowns. “Another dress?”

I shake my head. “I don’t have anything else that looks good.”

“You look beautiful in everything.”

His voice is so earnest that I want to cry. He’s trying his best to make light of a bad situation, but there’s no fixing it. There’s nothing else in my closet that is wedding appropriate. I had *one* decent dress to wear today, and now it doesn’t fit me anymore. I can’t afford a second dress. I couldn’t even afford the first dress.

I suppose I could go back to Macy’s and try to exchange it. Except I bought the dress weeks ago, and it seemed to leave more than enough room for growth, so I tossed the receipt. I had no idea I’d suddenly “pop” over the last week. Anyway, I can’t try to return it now—the last thing I want is to go into some store and they accuse me of stealing the dress. What if they call the police? What if I *go to jail* on my wedding day? That’s even worse than a death threat. Or at least, it’s *as* bad.

“I really wanted this dress,” is all I say.

“Okay, then.” Enzo sits beside me on the bed and takes my hand in his. “Give me the dress, and I will fix it.”

“Oh, I didn’t realize you were a seamstress.”

His lips twitch. “I know a guy who is a tailor. He owes me favor.”

I am highly skeptical, but what can I do? Either Enzo’s friend will come through, or I will get married in jeans and a T-shirt. Okay, I have a nice skirt and blouse I could wear. But it’s not my pretty blue dress.

Enzo calls his friend right away, who amazingly thinks he can get it done in time for the ceremony, which is now in *only three hours*. He asks for a bunch of measurements, which Enzo takes using the tape measure from his tool kit. Then he leaves with the numbers scribbled on a scrap of paper, my dress in a plastic bag, and his car keys, promising to be back in half an hour.

Honestly, I don’t understand why I can’t go with him to have the measurements taken by a professional, but Enzo had some convoluted reason why I can’t visit his friend. When he tries to explain it to me in Italian, I give up. It seems impossible that this dress will be ready in time, but I have to admit, Enzo rarely fails me.

While he's gone, I return to the bathroom to style my hair. You know how some women hire professional stylists to fix their hair prior to their weddings? Well, that does not happen in Casa Calloway. It's just me and my cheapo curling iron, doing the best we can.

Enzo prefers my hair down, but having it up is more wedding appropriate. Not that there are going to be tons of photos to post all over social media, but what if my parents want to take pictures? Or have pictures of me with them?

Maybe we will get a shot of the entire family together. A family photo. I never thought that would be possible.

I finally opt to leave my hair down, deciding that the appreciative look on Enzo's face will be worth it. I am careful not to scald myself with the curling iron, which tends to be a bit finicky, and after about half an hour, I have some pretty decent waves going on in my usually pin-straight blond hair. It will be straight again by the evening, but I only need it to last for the next three hours.

As I'm coming out of the bathroom, my phone is ringing where I last left it, which is on the coffee table in the living room. Much like the rest of the furniture in the apartment, we got our coffee table from the curb outside our building, and there's a book under the left leg to keep it from wobbling. I snatch my phone off the table just before the caller hangs up, and my heart sinks.

It's that same 718 number.

But on the plus side, Enzo isn't here to overhear the conversation. So I can feel free to give this guy a piece of my mind without anyone else catching wind of the fact that I am being threatened. I can dish it right back as well as I can take it.

I take a calming breath as I click on the green button to take the call. "Hello?"

"*Hello, Millie.*" It's that same harsh whisper, like he's disguising his voice. "Or should I say *goodbye?*"

I roll my eyes. "Why would you say goodbye?"