



Season Two:

Episode Four

The Count was waiting for Millicent as she came out of her apartment. She gasped, but quickly hid her alarm with a pleasant smile. He mustn't know that she no longer trusted him.

"Why, Count, I wasn't expecting you," she said. "What brings you by my apartment this evening?"

"I couldn't stay away, *ma chérie*," he said. "I hate to admit it, but every moment I'm away I find my thoughts returning to you."

"So sweet," Millicent said. "Why don't we have dinner tonight?"

"How amazing! You've read my mind. Why don't we go down now, while there are still to be tables before the dinner rush? There's so much I'd like to learn about you."

Millicent risked a glance down the hall.

"Was I interrupting you? Perhaps you made other plans," the Count said, his brow knitting at the thought that Millicent might want to get away from him.

"My calendar is always free for you," Millicent said.

"Excellent," said the Count as he took hold of her elbow and began to guide her down the hall to the elevators. "I want us to be so close. I'd hate to think there was anything about you I don't know. Or that you'd want to keep from me."

The Count's placid look returned as they walked, but Millicent was on guard. *Let him think I'm charmed*, Millicent told herself. *If I play dumb, he might let something slip.*

Tina and Jonie were at Cordelia's apartment, waiting for Millicent to arrive with the key. They'd been waiting quite a while.

“What time is it now?” Jonie asked for the third time.

“5:30. I keep telling you to wear your watch or at least carry your phone, Jonie.”

Jonie ignored this. “She should have been here by now. I’m worried.”

Tina nodded. “Millicent likes to take her time getting ready, but even she wouldn’t need this much time. Let’s go see if we can find her.”

As they knocked on Millicent’s door, her neighbor down the hall approached. Niles Coleman was a slim man with wiry tufts of hair sprouting from his ears. He was dressed in a t-shirt and jeans several sizes too large that were held up by suspenders. Millicent never failed to complain about his appearance.

“If y’all are looking for Millicent, she’s down in the dining room. With that Count fella. You know, the *prissy* looking one.”

Jonie and Tina looked at each other, mirroring the other’s look of bewilderment.

“You must be mistaken; Millicent is meeting us here. It’s very important,” Jonie said.

“I’m heading down there myself. I’ll show you,” Niles said. “I saw ‘em as I was heading up to get my favorite fork.” Niles pulled a slightly rusty looking piece of silverware from his pocket. “This one has just the right amount of weight to it. Plus, you never know where the silverware down there has been.”

Tina thought probably the same place the food and plates had come from, but thought better of noting this to Niles. Tina sighed. She had a feeling things were unraveling too fast to be of any good to Cordelia or Mal. And time was running out.

The dining room of Shady Bluff Senior Living was the hub of the community. It was the place where you caught up on gossip (Edith’s son was embezzling funds from his accounting firm; the new server’s boyfriend dealt drugs) and learned the latest news (schools of fish were washing ashore; no one knew why, the presidential race was heating up).

Millicent was surprised that the Count wanted to come here instead of the independent living’s restaurant, The Pale Horse. The sight of the two of them together was sure to get tongues wagging.

After they were seated, Millicent ordered them glasses of wine. The Count drank his down awfully quickly, then smiled, his teeth red and glistening.

Millicent decided to jump right into it. “What do you think of today’s hubbub?”

The Count took a sip of water. “What hubbub might that be?”

“Why, the news that we have a new Executive Director. Regina’s replacement has already taken over her office.”

The Count seemed unperturbed. “I imagine that sort of thing happens all the time in senior living. What little interactions I had with the director led me to believe she was likely out of her depth.”

“Oh, I never got that impression at all, myself. If anything, she seemed to need to control everything a little too much.”

The Count raised an eyebrow but shrugged his shoulders. “I should imagine the new administrator will be an improvement, regardless.”

“Have you met him, then?” asked Millicent.

“What would give you that impression?” asked the Count, a little too quickly.

“Nothing, really. You just sounded confident.”

“I believe that any administrator would be better than Regina Inkler. She’s always been slow to put the pieces together.”

“That’s really not fair, Count,” said Millicent. She was getting angry on behalf of Regina, whom she’d never much cared for, but still – the woman was in a coma fighting for her life! “You said yourself you’d not had many interactions with her. It’s not right to judge so harshly someone you don’t know.”

The Count frowned at her. “Are you scolding me?”

For a moment, Millicent was overcome by fear. Across the table from her was a man willing to drug her so that he might search through her belongings looking for her secrets, someone who was watching every single resident of the community. And she was confronting him! But then Millicent told herself that while she might be vain and she might be a little too quick to judge someone based off appearances, she knew right from wrong. And she was no coward.

“Friends don’t scold, Count, but friends can, and should, challenge each other if needed. Besides, you don’t want to date some timid church mouse, do you?”

The Count took her hand, gave it a gentle kiss. “You are right. I would not be happy unless I was with a woman who both challenged and excited me. I’ve never met someone like you, Millicent.”

Millicent feigned pleasure at his words, noting that the final sentence didn’t quite link up with the previous one as it should have.

Suddenly there was a great commotion from the front of the dining room and all heads swiveled toward the noises.

“I’ve been a resident here for five years, who are you to tell me what I can and can’t wear to the dining room?” Niles Coleman was shaking his fist at Helen, the hostess, while Tina and Jonie tried to melt into the background.

“Please, Mr. Coleman, I’m sorry, but Dr. Forthright said we have to enforce a dress code for folks dining with us in the evening. It’s right here on the sign.”

Sure enough, a sign had been placed on an easel by the hostess desk that read “For All Guests’ Enjoyment, Dress Code Will Be Strictly Enforced.”

“What kind of hoity toity nonsense is all this?” Niles screamed. “Let me in, I’m hungry! Resident Rights!” He turned back to Jonie and Tina. “I suppose you’ll let *them* in. Even though she’s dressed like a man!” He pointed at Tina, who was wearing slacks and a white blouse. Tina stepped forward.

“Helen, can’t you make an allowance? You’re really supposed to announce these things before they go into effect, you know.”

“We did announce it,” a voice behind her said, loud enough for the entire dining room to hear. It was the new administrator, Basil Q. Forthright. “We sent an email as well as alerted residents who were attending your little pickleball party this afternoon. I don’t recall seeing any of you there, however. I suppose it was too much to assume you’d read an email.”

Tina opened her mouth to reply, but Dr. Forthright raised a hand. On it was adorned a ring bearing the symbol of the caduceus, two snakes winding around a staff. Tina knew its common usage – as a symbol for medicine and doctors, but she had studied enough mythology to also know that it was the symbol for Hermes, the trickster god and protector of thieves. Her dislike of him intensified.

“No need to offer excuses or apologies. Neither one will be accepted. Ladies, if you would like to dine, you are within your rights. This gentleman, however,” and here the doctor placed a hand on Niles’s bony shoulder and squeezed. Niles winced. “Will need to come with me.”

“I don’t want to,” Niles said, but with a pleading tone in his voice. But he walked in step with Dr. Forthright as he was led away.

Tina looked like she wanted to go after them, but Jonie shook her head. “We can’t get involved, Tina. There’s too much at stake right now.”

Tina nodded. “I hate that guy,” she said.

“Would you ladies like a table?” Helen asked, smiling as if nothing had happened.

“Oh, that won’t be necessary, we’re just looking for a friend,” Jonie said. She saw Millicent at the same time as Tina. Millicent was laughing, one hand

resting atop the Count's hand. Her eyes were sparkling. Jonie had to hand it to her, that Millicent could really act.

"I'm gonna go talk to her," said Tina.

"Wait," said Jonie. "Look, she's getting a phone call, maybe she'll take it out here and we can get the key from her then. We don't want you-know-who to think we're spying on them."

Sure enough, Millicent stood up to take the call. "Count, dear, I'm so sorry. It's my daughter," Millicent said. "I'll be right back." It wasn't until she was past the dining room's entrance that she saw Jonie and Tina waiting for her.

"What are you doing?" Tina asked.

"Are you okay?" asked Jonie.

Millicent held up her phone. "It's Cordelia," she said and hit the button to connect. Tina and Jonie came as close as they could, straining to hear what was being said.

"The police?" Millicent said, then her eyes widened. "Kidnapped?!"

Credits

Director... Heather Maxon

Writers... Kathy Bubalo

Evelyn Mesley

Howard Simmons