

Midnight Melody

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I rushed out from behind the curtains, twirling and leaping around Jeanne as she belted out the first musical number in the show. My brown curls tumbled over my shoulders, dancing with my sudden, jerking, movements. Jeanne's voice was nice but there was no emotion behind it. Yet there was a reason they hadn't picked *me* for the main role. I wasn't beautiful enough. When the pianist started playing, the other dancers and I sang in the background. The audience of the theatre cheered us on frantically. I must admit, it was painful seeing her up there. Her dark hair was perfectly glossy and straight, gleaming under the ordinary theatre lights. She had cut it into the sleek bob you could see other French women wearing this season.

1947 was a new age, fresh from war.

I nearly melted when he stepped out on stage, surrounded by actors dressed as sailors. André's hair was perfectly ruffled, and his face glowed even under the ordinary, yellow lighting of the Blanchet Theatre. He made his way through the sailors and took Jeanne's hands in his. He flashed a smile and joined in the singing. His voice was smooth and enticing and he was effortlessly captivating the crowd.

The show was all about a city girl who falls in love with a sailor, but they are separated when he is sent out to sea. In the end, they reunite and it's a happily ever after for both Roger, the American sailor, and Yvonne, the Parisienne.

I snapped out of my daydream just as the queue for my solo came. I began to sing, throwing my arms out at 'Yvonne', telling her about the life I lived, always fearing the worst for my husband, the ship's captain.

*I wait upon the shore for days
Hoping he'll come home to me
The months fly by in a summer haze
While he is out at sea*

I finished with a front walkover and sauntered off stage. I heard the crowd cheering for me as I exited.

Once the show finished, I made my way to the dressing rooms and met up with Anne.

"Your voice sounded the best it ever has tonight!" she complimented me, pulling me into a sweaty hug.

"Thanks," I replied with gratitude.

"I saw someone eyeing you off, too..." she said mysteriously, turning to her mirror.

"Who!"

“André,”

I blushed furiously and that made Anne grin even wider.

“He was talking to one of the sailors, smiling and pointing at you. I think he liked your voice even more than the crowd did. *You* would play a much better Yvonne, you know.”

I muttered disagreement until she shoved a finger to my lips.

“It isn’t all about looks, Maria. Just because Jeanne is beautiful, doesn’t mean she’s the best choice for the lead role. She sounds like her mother forced her to sing it!”

“Thanks, Anne.”

“Anytime!” she said, bouncing off to go home to her husband and children.

I was the last one in the dressing room, packing my things, ready to go back to my apartment. I had just finished when André crept through the door.

“What are you doing?!” I laughed nervously.

“I came to see you, Mademoiselle Bernard.”

“Please, call me Maria.”

“Pleased to meet you, Mademoiselle – Maria!”

I giggled foolishly as he came closer to me.

“Listen, Maria, we need somebody to fill in for the final show, as Jeanne can’t make it to the final one. And Mr. Blanchet, the theatre manager...”

“I know who he is,” I chuckled, cutting him off.

“Right, yes. Well, he knows you know the part off by heart and I told him I’d see if you’d do it, for me?”

I nodded repetitively like a little girl, eager to please André.

“Perfect, thank you so much.” He planted a kiss on my lips before leaving me in the dressing room, bewildered.

Was he as much in love with me as I was with him?

No, it was only a gesture of gratitude, I convinced myself. But the thought lingered in my mind for the rest of that night. *A kiss? On the lips?*

At the next show, I waited impatiently behind the curtains as the audience quieted down. I was restless to get out on stage with André. As the piano began, I rushed out on stage, my flowing silk lavender dress flowing behind me. I clasped my gloved hands in front of me and launched into singing the first song about our very own city of lights, Paris.

*A city of colour and lights,
That can be seen from far away,
It does not rest for the night,
It can’t be kept at bay,*

*Walk the cobbled streets,
And you shall see!
The brightest light in Paris
Is he...*

As I sang the last line the lights dimmed, and the chorus girls soothed, André walked out onto the stage. I heard the crowd swoon when he tossed his perfectly messy hair out of his eyes and took my hands in his.

“But Yvonne...”

“I know, Roger. You must go out to sea. It is a sailor’s duty” I cried, fake tears running down my cheeks. The audience went quiet as Roger boarded the ship prop and then backstage. He and I both sang a few more separate musical numbers before the finale.

Roger rushed up and embraced me tenderly, burying my face in his chest. I could smell his cologne and feel the fabric of his jacket against my cheek.

“Yvonne! I am home...” he pretended to cry tears of relief and joy before pulling me back into his arms gently, letting me lean backward ever so slightly so my weight was supported by his arms. As the curtains drew shut and the final melody played at midnight, André kissed me passionately on the lips.

It wasn’t even scripted.

But this was our happily ever after, as Yvonne and Roger...Maria and André...