

**Carina Press Blog Tour Program: *The Secret Ingredient* by KD Fisher**  
**Excerpt**

The door clattered open and Andrew walked in, a stormy expression eclipsing my brother's normal goofy half smile. "Beth. Some people outside to see you."

Since The Yellow House had been awarded Best New Restaurant in the Northeast by the Martin Williams Foundation, a prestigious culinary organization I'd never heard of prior to receiving the letter in the mail, we'd been bombarded with reporters, bloggers, and more diners than we could possibly keep up with. Usually, though, they didn't show up a full four hours before we opened for the day.

Peeking through the window at the small gravel parking lot, I spotted a gleaming black Mercedes and three people sitting at one of the picnic tables in the garden. I wiped my hands on my apron and patted my hair, hoping that my curls hadn't dried in a frizzy mess. Dressing in the dark, I'd hardly had a moment to make sure my socks matched before dashing out of the house. A few too many times these visitors were enthusiastic with the photos and

I appeared in Instagram posts and blog entries looking like a wild and unruly thing.

"Good morning!" I called as I bounded down the stairs. The morning air brushed cool against my clammy skin. Before the fire settled down, the kitchen tended to get unbearably hot. The sunlight had gathered itself into soft rays that glistened off the dew in the vegetable and herb patches. A monarch butterfly fluttered across my path and I paused, letting it take its time. Medusa, the barn-cat-turned-restaurant-mascot, snoozed on one of the picnic tables, blissfully oblivious of the visitors.

At the sound of my voice all three of them stood: a tall, slim man in a beautifully tailored suit, a shorter man with a ruddy, irritable face, and another person with their back to me. She turned. Immediately my cheeks heated, and an awkward laugh bubbled up from my throat.

She was like something plucked from my adolescent queer fantasies. Bad boy and tough woman rolled into one. She wore dark jeans, a thick leather belt, and a white T-shirt with the sleeves cuffed a few times up to reveal sinewy biceps. Her dark blond hair was pushed back from her flawless, angular face in a messy not-quite-pompadour. Straight eyebrows a few shades darker than her hair. A long, delicate nose. Lips that probably would have been ample were they not pressed together in a tense frown.

"How can I help you folks?" I bit back the comment that we didn't open until eleven and offered a sweet smile instead.

The woman stepped forward without missing a beat, extending her hand. I closed the gap between us, shivering as her long fingers brushed my palm. Her skin was warm and a little work-rough. A heavy quiet settled over me as we shook hands. I had the strange thought that I could have held her hand all day. Up close I realized her narrow, wary eyes were a soft shade of green. They widened for a fraction of a second before she stepped back, shoving her hands into her pockets.

"I'm Adah Campbell, the new executive chef at Bella Vista. This is Sean Jacobs, our GM, and Riccardo Visconti, the head of our restaurant group." Beneath the formal veneer of her words, her voice thrummed with life. Her accent wasn't quite Southern, more country than anything else. It was the sound of humid thunderstorms and steaming biscuits slathered in home-churned butter. I never wanted her to stop talking.