
CONTENTS

[TITLE PAGE](#)

[COPYRIGHT](#)

[CHAPTER 1](#)

[CHAPTER 2](#)

[CHAPTER 3](#)

[CHAPTER 4](#)

[CHAPTER 5](#)

[CHAPTER 6](#)

[CHAPTER 7](#)

[CHAPTER 8](#)

[CHAPTER 9](#)

[CHAPTER 10](#)

[CHAPTER 11](#)

[CHAPTER 12](#)

[CHAPTER 13](#)

[CHAPTER 14](#)

[CHAPTER 15](#)

[CHAPTER 16](#)

[CHAPTER 17](#)

[SNEAK PEEK!](#)

[THANK YOU!](#)

[ALSO BY MINDY KLASKY](#)

[ABOUT MINDY KLASKY](#)

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ACT ONE, WISH ONE

Mindy Klasky

Act One, Wish One

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This book was previously released as *How Not to Make a Wish*.

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CHAPTER 1

I love the theater. The theater is my life.

At least that's what I told myself as I suffered my third sneezing fit in an hour.

Standing in the costume shop at the Fox Hill Dinner Theater, I extracted a linty tissue from my pocket and blew my nose, trying not to pay attention to the clouds of dust swirling in the overhead fluorescent lights. If I let myself think about how much debris filled the air around me, my lungs would seize up and I'd collapse in front of a dozen feather-covered costumes from *Gypsy*.

Act One, Wish One: A Humorous Paranormal Romance (As You Wish Series Book 1)

“Gotta have a gimmick, Kira Franklin,” I muttered to myself.

A gimmick—that was the name of the game in the cutthroat world of Midwestern dinner theater. And without one, Fox Hill would be out of business in less than a *Act One, Wish One: A Humorous Paranormal Romance (As You Wish Series Book 1)* month. Anna Harper, the dinner theater’s artistic director and my boss for the past seven years, was fully aware of our company’s dire straits. She’d been hinting for months that I should get my résumé out, that *Act One, Wish One: A Humorous Paranormal Romance (As You Wish Series Book 1)* I should try to nail down my dream job at Landmark Stage, the Twin Cities’ newest theatrical darling. In fact, she’d pretty much told me that my next paycheck would be my last—the theater loved me, couldn’t work without me, but just couldn’t afford to keep me, blah, blah, blah.

Alas, my Fox Hill credentials weren’t likely to spark interest from the Landmark. Like it or not, I’d limited my marketability by staying with Anna for as long as I had. Every time I applied for a position with the prestigious Landmark Stage—even just working in the ticket office—I received a polite, anonymous, form-letter rejection.

Act One, Wish One: A Humorous Paranormal Romance (As You Wish Series Book 1)
Nevertheless, barring a miracle, Anna was going to have to cut me loose. But we wouldn’t go down without a fight. Prior to hiring some starry-eyed kid right out of high school, Anna had decided on one last money-making scheme: selling our old costumes to the public. We were trying to be as festive as possible as we launched our last-ditch bid for survival—we had taken out full-page ads in both the Minneapolis *StarTribune* and the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* announcing our grand sale: Evening gowns! Dance wear! Halloween costumes for young and old alike!

We played up the glamour, providing a long list of our hit shows from the past decade. We kinda, sorta, maybe hoped that no one would focus on the fact that most of the costumes were designed for a handful of quick outings on stage. We absolutely refused to make any guarantee that seams would hold, that sequins would stay attached, that feathers and ribbons and bows would last through a single wearing at a glamorous society ball.

That’s why we kept a costumer on hand during all performances.

A costumer, someone to run lights, someone to run the sound board, people to change sets and hand out props—it could take more than a dozen backstage folks to mount one of our productions. And I was the person in charge of all of them, at least until I was laid off. Kira Franklin, stage manager Act One, Wish One: A Humorous Paranormal Romance (As You Wish Series Book 1) extraordinaire.

OK. That wasn't really the way that I thought of myself. I always stopped after the "manager" part.

But my father added the "extraordinaire" when he dutifully attended each of our productions. And so did my high school debate coach. And the handful of friends that I managed to rope into seeing individual shows, most often by handing out coupons for free dessert at our luscious gourmet buffet table (two entrées nightly!).

Come to think of it, most of my friends had dropped the "extraordinaire" a few years back, too. Maybe it was our Christmas production of *Miracle on 34th Street*, with a well-developed seventeen-year-old playing the little girl role, because we just couldn't Act One, Wish One: A Humorous Paranormal Romance (As You Wish Series Book 1) find a kid Act One, Wish One: A Humorous Paranormal Romance (As You Wish Series Book 1) who could stick to our rehearsal schedule.

Truth was, the Fox Hill Dinner Theater was not a leading Act One, Wish One: A Humorous Paranormal Romance (As You Wish Series Book 1) light in the Twin Cities' theater community.

Let me explain a little more about who and what and where we were. You've probably heard of the Mall of America, right? The largest shopping mall in North America, with more than four hundred stores? Employs 12,000 people? Built around an amusement park, with a flight simulator, aquarium, and real live (okay, dead) dinosaur walk? Visited by forty million people each and every year?

Fox Act One, Wish One: A Humorous Paranormal Romance (As You Wish Series Book 1) Hill was about a mile south of there.

We were located in an old strip mall, space we took over from a Woolworth's that was driven out of business by the big box stores even farther down the road. We had a decent-size "house" with Act One, Wish One: A Humorous Paranormal Romance (As You Wish Series Book 1) seating for five hundred. There were two steam tables to serve dinner, and a thrust stage that reached into the audience, bringing musicals so close that patrons could practically touch them. But in a metropolitan area with a thriving artistic community and more than one hundred theaters, large and small, Fox Hill had its work cut out for it.

And things weren't exactly helped by the fact that our next-door neighbor was a porno-movie theater—the Fox Hill Cinema. You might have thought that dirty movies were a losing business proposition in the wake of the Internet and perfect-for-home-viewing DVDs. The fading grande dame, though, had cleverly diversified to stay in business Act One, Wish One: A Humorous Paranormal Romance (As You Wish Series Book 1) with its three-screen emporium. Two showed the latest skin flicks, and one showed art films.

It could be Act One, Wish One: A Humorous Paranormal Romance (As You Wish Series Book 1) really interesting to watch the line at their ticket window. It was pretty easy to tell who was in line for the Truffaut retrospective, and who was waiting for Act One, Wish One: A Humorous Paranormal Romance (As You Wish Series Book 1) *Goldilust and the Three Bares*. At the dinner theater, we tried to promote ourselves to the first group, and we hoped that the second crowd didn't wander through our doors by mistake. You had to take your customers where you found them, though. Isn't that one of the primary rules of business? Well, it should have been.

"Kira? Are you in here?"

As if to answer, I sneezed again. "Yeah. In the back room."

Maddy Rubens pushed aside a sliding rack of thirty-six identical dresses—the irresistible Paris Originals from last year's overly optimistic production of

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