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From Chapter 2…

Staring at her computer screen, she realized that there was no way she could work tonight. Glancing at the clock, she saw that it was already after seven. She’d come in “late” this morning, only arriving around eight o’clock because she’d stayed up until around three in the morning, working on her latest canvas.

Her mind cringed at the idea of going through numbers any longer today. She just couldn’t do it. Peeking out the doorway of her tiny office, she saw only a few lights still on, indicating a couple of other accountants with the firm were still working hard.

Kate bit her lip, trying to decide what to do. She couldn’t stay here. She had to get out of this office, had to escape the claustrophobic confines of these four walls. She also knew that her father probably expected her to stay here and work on whatever else he’d assigned to her, in addition to the rework on the report.

But she couldn’t do it! She had to leave! She felt like the walls were closing in on her. It was suddenly imperative that she get out of this closet-sized room.

Grabbing her purse and her coat, she rushed out of her office. Keeping her head low, she raced down the hallway, determined to get out of the office as quickly as possible. She wasn’t going to stop for anything.

Thankfully, her father’s office was to the left in the corner. She had the office at the end of the hallway – the smallest office on the floor without any windows. She was at the bottom of the totem pole. Her father had made that clear when he’d assigned her to this office. No perks just for being the owner’s daughter.

Well, she didn’t care what perks or responsibilities she had right now. She needed to get out, to feel alive! She needed to breathe in air that wasn’t surrounded by the chronically bored! Escape was crucial.

Rushing through the glass main entrance doors, she almost burst into the outside hallway. She was just about to press the call button for the elevator, but thought better of it. Someone might come out, find her trying to leave before all of her work was done and report it to her father. Then she’d be here for the rest of the night, because in an accounting firm, the work was never really done. It could go on forever!

Perhaps she was exaggerating a little, but she didn’t care. Diving for the staircase, she slammed through the doorway and ran down the stairs. When she’d reached the tenth floor, she took off her heels, wanting to get out of the building faster.

When she reached the street level, she rushed through the exit, taking in deep gulps of outside air as she leaned against the side of the building, just to the right of the doors. She didn’t even care that the air was filled with exhaust from the cars racing past
as they hurried home to their families. The air particles weren’t filled with numbers, that was all that mattered.

She started off down the street, intending to walk the ten blocks to her tiny apartment. Despite the distance, she was reveling in her escape and the openness around her, unconstrained by walls and free of re-circulated air.

It was cold outside, with winter just around the corner. She’d forgotten her coat but it didn’t matter. She was outside and not staring at a computer screen. Kate took several more deep breaths, letting the other pedestrians move around her as they hurried to their homes or next destination.

As she passed by one of the hotels, she heard soft jazz playing from a piano. The sound didn’t actually strike her so much as wrap around her, slow her down and soothe the frayed nerves that had become frazzled by her father’s rant.

Stopping in front of the hotel, she looked inside, trying to find the source of the music, but all she saw was the elegant lobby and people milling about with a sense of purpose. It was one of the best hotels in Boston and she stared up at the sophisticated logo, wondering what it was like inside. While her mind sifted through images, her body almost swayed to the jazzy music, humming along and letting the stress of the day flow out of her. Softly, ever so slowly, the moody music released the tension from her father’s harsh words and her most recent failure in his eyes.

“Would you like to go inside, ma’am?” the doorman asked kindly, looking at her with a fatherly smile.

Her first reaction was to shake her head. Most months, she had to scrimp to pay the rent on her cramped studio apartment. But then she remembered the big check from her paintings. A smile slowly formed on her face. She wasn’t aware of the doorman’s gasp as her smile transformed her features. Despite her ignorance of the fact, she was a strikingly beautiful woman. Her dark brown hair was tied up in a professional looking knot on the back of her head which only emphasized the high cheekbones and the elegant line of her jaw. Her eyes were a startling color of light blue that sometimes seemed almost magical, especially against her thick, black lashes. They were the eyes that one would see on a witch, her father had mentioned on several occasions, and not in a complimentary tone. So she had no idea that men stopped to watch her on the street and women raced to the makeup counters, demanding to find makeup tricks to help them achieve her look.

But when she smiled, there was something almost ethereal about her. She was so slender and her bone structure so delicate, but a smile showed the world that there was much more to her. It had a way of obliterating the grace and shyness that most people
had on first impression. When it appeared, it told the world that she had secrets. Secrets everyone wanted to discover.

Kate looked up again, closing her eyes and absorbing the music. “Yes,” she said with a sigh. “I think a glass of wine would be a perfect end to a perfectly horrible day.”

The doorman, normally very efficient and gracious with the hotel guests, stumbled as she approached. He found his footing quickly enough, but blushed when she smiled her thanks a moment before she slipped through the doorway.

Inside, Kate stood very still, her mind and shoulders releasing more of the tension from the day as the sound of the music increased, surrounding her. She didn’t realize it, but she was now swaying to the music, leaning in to the sound and letting it flow around her and through her. She closed her eyes, letting her mind picture the sounds on a canvas. How could she capture the rhythm? How could she demonstrate the soothing feeling of the music with brush stroke and color? Or what items could she attach to her canvas and paint around that would “speak” the sounds to the viewer? It was a new challenge, one her fingers were itching to try and capture.

She almost danced over to the bar, and perched on a stool, not looking at the piano player, not wanting the music to be personified just yet. She’d give credit to the artist, but she wanted to just live in the sound for a few more minutes.

She was also unaware of the dark eyes watching her from the corner of the room. Nor was she aware of the smoldering intent in those eyes.

“Can I get you something to drink?” the bartender asked as he polished the already shining wood bar in front of her.

Kate opened her eyes, startled to see the bartender leaning over the counter, but she admonished herself for that surprise. She was in a bar, of course a bartender would approach her. “Oh, goodness,” she responded, laughing at how ridiculous she looked. But then the prospect of a decadent treat hit her and she bit her lower lip in excitement, her eyes sparkling. She didn’t see the startled expression on the bartender’s face as he took in the change in her beautiful features. “My yes, I’d like the most exotic and crazy drink you could give me,” she said, barely able to sit still on the bar chair.

She hadn’t seen the eyes watching her entrance, nor did she see those same eyes watching her bottom wiggle on the chair. The smoldering intent changed slightly, becoming more intense as Davis thought about his hands on her very round, very sexy bottom.

The bartender smiled, thrilled to not have to pour another white wine, beer, or scotch on the rocks. “You got it,” he said with enthusiasm. “I’ll be right back.”
Kate smiled gratefully to him, then closed her eyes once more, letting the music transform her day.

“Here you go,” he said, and placed a pink martini in front of her. “If you don’t like it, no charge.”

She laughed, delighted with the frilly drink. “What is it?” she asked in almost a whisper.

He winked at her. “Try it first. See if you can figure it out.”

Davis watched in fascination as the enchanting woman lifted the disgusting looking drink to her rose bud lips, his body tightening in response. Was she doing that on purpose? Did she have any idea how erotic that looked?

Ten minutes ago, when she’d first walked in, he would have said no. She’d looked too innocent, too delighted to be one of the hard core, professional women who frequented this bar. If it weren’t for her outfit, he might even suspect she was a prostitute. She had that sexy look about her, but that horrible ill-fitting suit and those hideous black pumps with the matronly one inch thick heel … no. A professional would be wearing stilettos and a tight, figure hugging dress. A professional wouldn’t be caught dead in suit like this woman had donned. It looked two sizes too large, cheap, and wrinkled. Almost like she’d slept in it.

But her eyes! They were astonishing. And her cheekbones? He knew fashion models who had pulled their back teeth to make their cheekbones look like that. But a lack of back teeth didn’t seem to be this woman’s problem. No molars made it hard to chew and this woman munched on a pretzel, obviously not having any trouble with the crunchy treat.

What the hell was she drinking? The bartender seemed to be pretty proud of whatever the pink concoction was, but Davis wouldn’t be caught dead drinking such a thing.

Time to explore, he thought, picking up his drink and moving towards the bar.

“What is it?” he asked, sitting down next to her at the bar.

Kate’s eyes snapped open, then she looked up at the enormous man sitting on the stool next to her. “Excuse me?” she asked, her voice tripping as she examined his height and breadth. He was shockingly attractive, she thought. And huge! And goodness, he was hot! Everything about him screamed confidence and sex appeal. The impact on her senses was more powerful than the music and the drink combined.

“The drink. What’s in it?”

Kate looked down at the drink, then back up at the man’s strong and somewhat intimidating features. He had black hair and dark, mysterious eyes that revealed
nothing. Her eyes drifted to his lips and the artist in her desperately wanted to paint him. Naked. She caught her breath at the idea, her eyes moving over his large body, noting fabric drawn taut by his muscles rather than excess weight. In fact, his stomach looked flat and hard. Her mind instantly started to wonder how she would pose him and she blushed at the possibilities.

“Do I pass?” he asked with a half-smile on his hard looking mouth.

Kate’s eyes shot back up to his and she felt her face flame red. “I’m so sorry,” she whispered, her fingers moving up to cover her cheeks. “That was inappropriate of me.”

Davis laughed, delighted with her freshness. “I’ll forgive you if you’ll tell me your name.”

Kate cringed, feeling horrible. “I’m Kate Evans,” she told him, extending her hand in what she hoped was an appropriate manner. “And I should never have objectified you like that. I would never have done it if I hadn’t been drinking. But this seems to be a very strong drink and I’m not used to it. I almost never drink. In fact…” she realized that she was rambling and closed her mouth. “Never mind,” she whispered, taking another long sip of her drink.

“Why did you stop?” he asked, enjoying her refreshing innocence as well as her erotic image. The two seemed completely opposite and somehow, she pulled it off. The combination was heady and he intended to explore other combinations she might have hidden. He wondered if she practiced the image in the mirror. She couldn’t be real, he thought.

Did he care? Not at all.

“Two more drinks,” he said to the bartender.

The man snapped to attention, quickly pouring another bourbon and mixing another martini.

“I probably shouldn’t have a second,” she said, but licked her lips as she drained the first glass. “But I don’t care. Tonight, I’m not worrying about anything!”

She thanked the bartender sweetly as he took her first drink and placed the second on a fresh napkin.

“You never told me what is in that,” he said, staring down at the martini glass with the pink liquid and twist of lime. “It looks awful.”

Kate laughed, feeling relaxed with the music flowing around her and the alcohol in her system, not to mention the attention of a gorgeous, sexy man. It was almost like she was a different person.

“It’s a watermelon martini,” she explained with a grin and an unconscious twinkle in her crystal blue eyes. “As my new favorite bartender just told me, it has
crushed watermelon, whipped cream vodka and watermelon liqueur.” She took a sip, smiling at him over the rim of her glass. “Oh, and a squeeze of lime as well.”

Davis stared at her, trying to hide his revulsion. “I was right. That is disgusting.”

Kate didn’t take offense. She liked it. “It’s pretty sweet, but also just what I needed.”

“Bad day?” he asked, thinking back to the information Jeff had conveyed. Davis had added up the numbers. Someone had stolen between five and nine million dollars over the past year. And that someone was going to pay dearly for such abuse.

Kate sighed. “It’s over,” she said, leaning her chin on the upright palm of her hand. “You looked very angry a moment ago, but that’s all gone now. What just went through your mind?”

Davis was astonished that she’d noticed. Most people said he was a man without emotions. He chuckled every time he read such a thing in a news article or magazine. It wasn’t that he was emotionless. He just didn’t put his feelings out there for others to see. But this slender beauty caught a flash of something he’d thought was well hidden.

He pushed that issue aside and focused on getting to know this mysterious woman in the bad suit and grandmother shoes. “Doesn’t matter. Tell me about yourself.”

She smiled and Davis felt a punch of something, his eyes sharpening on her delicate structure. He wasn’t sure what had just happened, and he wasn’t sure he liked it. He didn’t like surprises, but this woman had delivered one just by smiling?

Kate sighed and twirled her drink slightly, needing to look at something other than this man’s eyes. They were distracting and fascinating. “My day was fine until the last hour. Then it all came tumbling down.” She took another long sip of her drink, enjoying the way her shoulders no longer felt like they had a granite weight on them.

“What happened?” he asked, truly interested. Another surprise. She didn’t look like the kind of woman who would allow stress to get to her. He’d known many flighty women but somehow, she didn’t fit the stereotype. But he couldn’t place her in a category. Not yet, anyway.

Kate turned to stare at her drink. “I’m an accountant,” she explained, almost embarrassed to admit it. “But not a very good one, apparently.” She cringed as she thought back to her closet sized office and her father’s fury at her latest mistake.

“Why would you say that?” She dressed like an accountant, he supposed. Well, at least like the accountants he’d run into. He supposed that some accountants could be
well dressed fashionistas, but in his experience, they tended to lose themselves in the numbers and not worry so much about what they looked like.

Kate took another sip, needing the alcohol to continue with her admission. “Because I’m horrible with numbers. They just aren’t what my brain focuses on,” she said. Her eyes flashed up to his, then down his magnificent body.

“What does your brain focus on?” he asked, having caught the flash of her eyes.

She looked back down at her drink, fiddling with the stem of the glass. “Oh, I don’t know really,” she lied. “I guess I’m just not wired correctly for the accounting field.” She wondered what her father would do if she told him she was quitting and would be painting full time from now on. She suspected he would be furious, but the idea suddenly had a lot of merit. Should she find another accounting job or just risk it all on art?

“Why do you stay in the job then?”

She shrugged. “It pays the rent.”

“Is that really what you want to do with your life?” he asked softly, his hand taking hers, the strong thumb rubbing against her fingers. “Do you really want to live a life doing what you hate?”

His hand was sending shivers along her entire body. She couldn’t believe how much just a simple touch was making her mind spin out of control. “Not really,” she whispered back up to him.

“Then why not follow your passions?” he asked.

She smiled nervously. “Passions don’t pay the rent.”

“They do if you are good at them.” He twisted her hand around, his thumb tracing patterns over the palm of her hand, causing her to shiver and some strange sensation pooled in her stomach, moving lower. It was almost embarrassing, that feeling.

“I’m good at something,” she replied, thinking of her art work and the check she’d just received.

Davis smiled slightly. “I bet you are.” His thumb moved higher, resting on the pulse beating at her wrist. “Tell me what your passions are.”

Her breath quickened and she blinked, trying to think of what his question was. It was hard to focus with his thumb doing that to her palm. Goodness, what was this man doing to her?

“Um….I’m very good at…” his thumb reached her pulse and she stopped, staring down at his dark hand holding her pale one. It was so much larger than hers, so
much stronger. The difference was fascinating. She was pretty sure that she wanted to paint just this, their two hands gently holding the other, but her mind wasn’t sharp enough at the moment to form that thought completely.

“Have dinner with me and tell me about the things you’re good at,” he commanded.

Kate looked up at his handsome face and nodded. She wasn’t even aware of her nod until the flare of victory in his eyes flashed and she smiled up at him. “I’d like that,” she whispered.

A moment later, he tossed several bills down on the bar and took her hand, leading her out of the bar and into the elevator. “Where are we going?” she asked, not sure this was a good idea any longer. Why weren’t they heading to the hotel dining room? Or one of the restaurants that lined the street?

They were the only two people in the elevator at the moment and it whisked them up higher. She was captured by his eyes, her neck craned backwards to see his face. She loved looking at his eyes, amazed at their color. “Your eyes are blue,” she said, sounding silly but she’d thought they were a dark brown in the bar.

He moved closer to her, saw her mouth fall open slightly and was entranced by that silent invitation. Normally, he would act on that but he suspected that Kate didn’t realize what she was offering.

“Yes. They’re dark blue,” he replied, chuckling at the blush that stole up her cheeks again. “And yours are a light blue. A fascinating, light blue that changes to a slightly darker blue when you are thinking about something.” He reached up and slid his finger down her cheek. “What are you thinking about right now?” he asked.

She inhaled, loving the way he smelled. “I’m thinking that you smell incredibly nice,” she admitted.

He smiled again. “So do you. Like watermelon,” he told her.

She cringed but there was humor in her eyes. “It was a silly drink, I know. But it was perfect.”

The elevator opened up and he stepped through the doors, right into the penthouse suite of the hotel. “What would you like for dinner?” he asked, lifting the phone to call the kitchen.

Kate looked around, intimidated by the opulence she was seeing, and the obvious wealth it took to enjoy it. “Um…anything is fine.”

Davis called down an order for something with chicken, telling the chef to surprise them. He also had the butler service bring up a bottle of wine as well as some appetizers. He wanted Kate relaxed, but not drunk tonight.
“Why don’t you take off your jacket?” he suggested, doing the same. He whipped off his tie as well, tossing both onto the soft-looking sofa.

“What do you do?” she asked, following his lead but holding the jacket over her arms, not sure she wanted that barrier gone.

“You mean, besides seduce innocent women who show up in bars?” he asked, teasing her. He moved closer to her, taking her jacket. “I fully intend to try and make love to you tonight, Kate. But I didn’t bring you up here to do that.” His hand cupped her check, then moved to touch the strands of her hair that had come loose from the intricate swirl on the back of her head. “I can’t eat in the dining room without being disturbed. I thought this would be a bit more private.”

“Yes but…” she still wasn’t sure, although his explanation did make her feel slightly better. Was she being naïve by believing him?

“No buts;” he countered. “Just relax. Nothing will happen that you don’t want to happen.”

She smiled slightly, still hugging herself. “I think that’s actually the problem,” she whispered, then looked up at him nervously, to see if he understood what she was saying.

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