

NO TURNING BACK

Book One In The Kathleen Turner Series

Tiffany Snow

Also by Tiffany Snow

No Turning Back, The Kathleen Turner Series

Turn to Me, The Kathleen Turner Series

Turning Point, The Kathleen Turner Series

Out of Turn, The Kathleen Turner Series

Blank Slate

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No Turning Back
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ISBN 978-0-615-48330-6

Chapter One

Planting your face in someone's lap usually isn't considered the best way to begin a new job. Well, maybe some jobs, but not this job. I was a runner at the prestigious Indianapolis law firm of Gage, Kirk and Trent, a position that occupied a rung right above mailgirl but below copyboy. Unfortunately, that position currently had me facedown in the lap of the aforementioned Kirk of said prestigious law firm.

Blane Kirk was a partner and second-in-charge at the firm. In his early to midthirties, he was a rich, blue-blooded type with the looks to match—tall, with dirty-blond hair, gray-green eyes, and perfectly even, perfectly white teeth. A small dimple appeared when he smiled. That dimple was nowhere in evidence at this particular moment.

I remembered with vivid clarity the phone call I'd had with Clarice, Blane's secretary, not ten minutes ago.

"Can you please get the Kimmerson file off my desk and take it to Blane?" she asked. "I'm trapped in traffic and he texted me that he needed it right away."

"Sure, no problem."

I did as she requested, retrieved the file and took it to the conference room on the third floor.

When I walked into the room, everyone immediately turned to look. My hands got sweaty and my face flushed at being the center of attention. There were about a dozen people there, all men, of course. If that wasn't bad enough, Blane was the farthest away from the door, at the far end of the conference table. I headed straight for him, the sound of my heels muffled on the carpet, and everyone returned to their discussions, which my entrance had interrupted. I breathed a sigh of relief. Unfortunately, that relief was premature.

I was about two feet from Blane when my heel caught on the carpet. The papers I had in my hand went flying and I landed face-first in Blane's lap, like an overeager dog sniffing hello.

His hands gripped my shoulders like a vise as he tried to pry me off. In my scramble to right myself, my hand landed somewhere it shouldn't and Blane grunted.

"Oops." The words were desperately inadequate for the situation, but they fell out of my mouth anyway.

My eyes flew up in a panic to meet his and I saw his jaw clench and his gray-green eyes flash. Could this possibly get any worse?

I winced as his hands tightened on me. He was a strong guy and he quickly picked me up and removed me from his lap, standing and setting me back on my feet. I didn't dare look up to see what expression was on his face, as I could imagine it just fine, thank you very much.

"So sorry," I gasped out weakly, like a suffocating fish. Dropping abruptly to my knees like a marionette with its strings cut, I began crawling around on the floor, gathering the mess.

The room was absolutely quiet. It had happened so quickly I think everyone had been stunned into silence. Then I heard the sound of muffled laughter, quickly covered up by coughing and the clearing of throats. Papers shuffled above me as I scooted around under the table, avoiding the men's shoes and frantically grabbing sheets, heedless of how crumpled they were becoming as I shoved them into a pile.

I climbed clumsily to my feet, thrusting the papers, now a disordered and crumpled mess, at Blane. Mumbling another sorry, I beat a hasty retreat, watching the floor carefully as I escaped the room.

As the door swung shut behind me, I heard one of the men say, “Now they’re literally throwing themselves at you, Blane. What will they think of next?” This was followed by laughter. I squeezed my eyes shut in dismay as the door closed.

What a horrific ending to how excited I’d been at the prospect of being face-to-face with Blane Kirk for the first time since I’d started working at the firm. I’d been in silent awe of him since the first moment I’d laid eyes on him.

Lori, one of the paralegals, had showed me around on my first day at the firm. She was introducing me to a few of the other paralegals gathered around the coffee station, all female, when Blane walked by.

“God, I love to watch him move,” one of them sighed.

My eyes followed him down the hall and I silently agreed with her.

“Well, look your fill, because that’s all you’re going to be getting,” another one shot back, to a round of laughs and sighs.

“Who was that?” I asked Lori, watching him disappear into the elevator.

“That was Blane Kirk,” Lori said. “He’s one of the partners and a real big shot in this town. Rich, smart, and absolutely divine.”

“And doesn’t he know it,” another girl said.

“Maybe when he runs out of rich socialites to date, we’ll get a shot,” one of them offered.

“Right,” said Lori with a snort. “He doesn’t date girls at work. Everyone knows that.”

It seemed that quite a majority of the women were enamored to some degree with Blane Kirk. But who could blame them? After all, what wasn’t to like? Blane was clever and well-educated, successful and ambitious, with a face that made women weak in the knees and a body that made their mouths water.

A man like him intimidated mere mortals like me, so I avoided him, admiring from afar, and had never spoken to him until today. Ironic that the first words out of my mouth had to be an apology. I groaned quietly in embarrassment, wanting to bang my head on the solid oak-paneled door at my back.

Hurrying back to my cube, I huddled with my head in my hands, wallowing temporarily in my misery. My phone rang and I saw it was Clarice calling from upstairs. She and I had gotten to know each other since I’d been at the firm and had hit it off right away, even though she was several years older than me.

“Hey, Clarice,” I greeted her with false gaiety.

“Morning, Kathleen,” she replied. “Thanks so much for helping me out. Did you find the files and take them to Blane for me?”

Yes, I certainly had.

“Um...yeah, I guess,” I said weakly.

“What’s the matter?” she asked. “Did everything go all right?”

“Uh, well,” I hesitated. “I kind of tripped and...landed...on Blane. In a rather...unfortunate position.”

She gasped, then I heard a snort of laughter.

“So not funny, Clarice,” I warned her.

She tried to quell her giggles. “I know, I know! It’s just the image...of you—”

Her thought was cut off by laughter and I waited in sour silence for her to finish.

“The look on his face had to have been priceless,” she finally sputtered.

“I tried not to notice,” I said dryly. Although I was still embarrassed, I could see the humor in it, and a huff of my own laughter escaped.

I may have been able to laugh with Clarice, but that didn’t mean I wanted to be within ten feet of Blane Kirk at any point in the foreseeable future.

To my horror, later that morning I saw him heading down the hallway to Diane’s office. Diane Greene was the formidable office manager and my direct boss. Had Blane come to get me fired?

I listened intently from my cube as he gave her instructions on something he wanted and files he needed her to prepare, hoping beyond hope he wouldn’t tell her what had happened. My heart sank when he asked, “Who’s the new girl?”

“You mean the new runner?” Diane asked. “Her name is Kathleen.”

That’s me—Kathleen Turner. And no, I’m not that Kathleen Turner. Consider it a family joke. My dad’s name was Ted Turner, my grandma was Tina Turner. My parents were just carrying on the tradition when I came along.

“Why?” Diane continued. “Is there a problem?”

I held my breath. It had only been a month, but no matter how nice I was to Diane, I couldn’t get on her good side. Somehow I didn’t think it would take much for her to fire me, and I needed this job.

“You could say that,” he replied, and I winced at the irritation in his voice. “Where is she?”

Oh God. I panicked when I heard Diane tell him where my cube was. This could not be happening to me. What was I supposed to say? What if he thought I’d done that on purpose? I’d have to get a new job because I’d be too mortified to work here any longer.

Tossing aside my pride—that ship had sailed—as well as the thought that perhaps I might be acting more like a twelve-year-old rather than a mature twenty-four-old, I dove underneath my desk, and not a moment too soon. I saw Blane’s shoes as he stepped into my cube. I held my breath, waiting. I noticed he wore really nice leather shoes—were those Gucci? Whatever. They were big. A thought flashed through my mind about something I’d once heard, that the size of a man’s feet was in direct proportion to the size of his—

I cut that thought off, squeezing my eyes shut in mortification. That was not an appropriate thought to be having about a partner in the firm, no matter how attractive he was. When I opened my eyes, I saw he had finally turned and walked away. I heaved a sigh of relief before climbing out.

Over the next several months, I stayed true to my word—I didn’t let Blane Kirk lay eyes on me more than a handful of times. My job seemed secure and I breathed more easily.

Today as I got ready for work, I was grateful it was Friday. I worked two jobs to help make ends meet, tending bar several nights a week. Not really what I’d envisioned for myself at this point in my life, but I’d much rather be doing this than a lot of other minimum-wage jobs.

I didn’t have to work tonight, but I did last night and had not gotten to bed until after one. Those nights always made it hard to get up for my day job, where I got to do all the jobs no one else wanted to do. Need to file documents at the courthouse? Have the runner do it. Want coffee from Starbucks for the staff meeting? Send the runner. Carl in accounting needs a lift into the office because he totaled his car again? Kathleen can pick him up.

I grabbed my coffee and headed out the door. I lived on the top floor of my two-story apartment building. It wasn’t in the greatest part of town, but I hadn’t had any problems. It was a gorgeous October morning, the sun shining brightly with a chill in the air. I was glad I’d added a jacket before leaving. I jogged down the stairs, running into my neighbor on the way.

“Morning, Sheila,” I said, smiling at her.

Sheila often came home in the early morning hours. She was about my age, but her life was drastically different. Sheila worked as a high-priced call girl. Her plan was to work until she had enough money to put herself through medical school and then quit.

When I first moved here six months ago, she’d offered to hook me up. I’d tried to conceal my shock (my small-town upbringing had never been more apparent) and politely declined. I couldn’t imagine that kind of lifestyle, no matter how much money was involved. It seemed to work for Sheila though. She was several inches taller than me and had long, straight brown hair. Being pretty and well-spoken, she could pull off a sophisticated look very well.

“Hey, Kathleen,” she said. “Off to work?” I nodded. I was running late, but paused for a moment.

“Another day and all that,” I said. “You doing all right?” I worried about her. I couldn’t accept that her occupation was safe, no matter what she said about the clientele being upper-class.

“Oh yeah,” she said, smiling tiredly. “I’ve got a customer now who’s real into me. He’s been a repeat five times now.”

From what she had told me before, I knew that was good, since repeat customers for her were money in the bank.

“That’s great,” I said. I would have asked who he was but she’d mentioned once before that her clients demanded confidentiality. “Is he nice?” I asked instead.

“He’s all right, I guess,” she said, leaning back against the stair railing as she talked. “Not sure what he does for a living, but I think he’s loaded.” She hesitated for a moment before adding, “I just hope Mark doesn’t get all weird about it.”

Mark was her boyfriend. It was a relationship I couldn’t really figure out, but it seemed to work for them. Mark was a pretty decent guy and didn’t say very much about Sheila’s profession. I’d met him a few times and they seemed very into each other. He was one of those quiet, geeky types that I never would have guessed Sheila would go for. I suppose the old saying that “opposites attract” really was true.

“I thought he didn’t mind...you know,” I said, waving my hand vaguely. I wasn’t really sure how to put into words “didn’t mind you having sex with random men for money” without offending her. She was very adamant about being a “high-priced call girl” and not a hooker.

“He didn’t, but he’s been acting weird lately,” she said, chewing on her lower lip.

“Weird how?” I asked.

She shook her head. “I don’t know. Just...distracted maybe? Like he’s with me, but not all there. I don’t know if it’s me or us or something else.” Sighing, she added, “I’m probably just being paranoid.”

“He really cares about you,” I reassured her. “Maybe he’s just preoccupied with work or something.”

“Yeah,” she said, not seeming convinced. “I guess so.” She seemed to shake herself out of her reverie. “Hey, I’m making you late aren’t I?”

I glanced at my watch and grimaced. “Sorry, you’re right, I’d better go. Dragon Diane will be watching to see if I’m on time, I’m sure.”

Sheila laughed. She knew I disliked Diane and that the feeling was mutual. “Well, get going then, Kathleen,” Sheila said, giving me a squeeze on the arm and smiling ruefully. “I’ll catch you later. Thanks for listening.”

“You bet,” I said, giving her a quick hug before hurrying to my car. I drove a ten-year-old blue Honda Accord that ran like a top, thank God. I couldn’t afford a car payment. I felt slightly envious of how much money Sheila made—she’d told me once—but knew I couldn’t live that life. I made a mental note to stop by tonight when I got off work and see how she was doing.

Traffic wasn’t bad and I made it to the firm in just over half an hour. I lived close to downtown Indianapolis, but the firm was in the much-nicer northern part of Indy, full of brick office buildings, trees, and wide expanses of green lawns.

Pulling into the parking lot, I noticed who else but Blane Kirk leaving the building. Crap. I was already late, but I waited in my car anyway so he wouldn’t see me. I carefully sipped my hot coffee and watched in my rearview mirror as he walked across the lot. He was dressed for court today, wearing a dark suit and tie and carrying an expensive leather briefcase.

I wondered if I’d ever be able to look him in the eye again. The Incident (as I’d taken to calling it) still made my cheeks burn whenever I thought about it. Not that there was much cause for me to interact with Blane anyway—since he was a partner and I was just the runner. He’d never tried to find me again after that one disastrous morning, though I still wondered what would have happened if I hadn’t hid under my desk.

“Fired me, most likely,” I muttered to myself.

Rumor had it Blane had ambitions for political office, and it was obvious that he was a natural. Blane was charismatic and charming. When he walked into a room, people noticed, their eyes drawn to him, the very air around him seeming to crackle with electricity. His face never gave away his thoughts, even when he’d flash his killer smile, the kind that sprang from nowhere and turned any female within sight into quivering mush. It seemed I was the only one who noticed that his smile never touched his eyes.

Blane finally disappeared around the corner of the building to the partners’ reserved parking spots. I gave it just another minute or two to make sure he’d gone before I got out of my car and headed inside.

I heaved an inward sigh as I stopped by Diane’s desk for any morning deliveries. This was the part of the day I hated the most. Diane took her job as office manager very seriously, had absolutely zero sense of humor, and was a singularly unattractive woman. Her harsh demeanor only emphasized her sourpuss face, which she never wore a stitch of makeup on. We maintained a stiffly polite relationship.

This morning Diane wasn’t at her desk when I stopped by and for that I was grateful. The stack of deliveries was waiting for me on the corner of her desk, so I grabbed them and headed for the sixth floor. I also had to stop by the three partners’ offices to see if their secretaries had anything for me.

The fifth floor was occupied by Blane Kirk and Derrick Trent, another partner in the firm, and their secretaries. The sixth and top floor was where the oldest partner and founder of the firm, William Gage, had his office.

When I got to the fifth floor, I stopped to see Clarice. Blane’s door was closed and the lights were out. He had a corner office with windows on two walls and it was gorgeously furnished in rich mahogany. Clarice’s desk was a smaller version of his, positioned outside his office, with the luxury of a large work area.

“Hey, Clarice,” I said, and she looked up from her computer, smiling when she saw who it was. Clarice was only thirty but dressed much older than that, I guess because it suited her profession as a legal secretary. Her dark hair was pulled back into a bun and she always wore

sensible shoes. When she smiled, it softened her whole face and made her appear younger and more carefree.

“Hey, yourself,” she said. “On your way out?”

I nodded. “I have a stack for the courthouse and some other firms around town today.”

Glancing around to make sure we were alone, she leaned forward, grinning as she spoke in a low voice. “Do you want to hear the latest?”

I moved closer. “Of course,” I said eagerly.

Clarice and I had a running joke about the women Blane dated, betting each other on how long each would last and if the latest one would make a scene or go quietly when he ended it. There had been some memorable scenes from the more dramatic ones. Clarice liked Blane well enough—he was always polite and cordial to her. He just wasn’t really “our” kind of people here in the Midwest—a little too snobbish, way too rich, and a tad condescending.

Clarice had told me yesterday that Blane had asked her to send the requisite farewell flowers to his latest flavor of the month. Some took the news well and some...didn’t. This latest girl—her name was Kandi-with-an-i—had seemed the dramatic type, and I’d bet Clarice five bucks she wouldn’t go quietly.

“Okay,” Clarice started, as anxious to impart the juicy gossip as I was to hear it. “So the story is she got the flowers yesterday and went nuts. Showed up at his house and waited for him to get home. Then she proceeded to scream and curse at him while standing on his front porch. And”—now her grin widened—“that wasn’t even the best part.”

I was practically holding my breath in anticipation. “What was the best part?”

“She posted on her Facebook page that he has a tiny dick.”

I gasped, clapping a hand over my mouth.

“I know!” Clarice said with a mischievous grin. “As if anyone’s going to believe her.”

“No kidding,” I breathed.

Our eyes met and we both laughed. Blane’s appeal was a universal constant. He was over six feet of male perfection. The idea that he’d not be...well-endowed...was ludicrous. I remembered what I’d thought when I’d been in close proximity to his sizable shoes while hiding under my desk, and I felt my face flush.

“How did you hear about it?” I asked, pushing aside thoughts I had no business thinking about Blane Kirk.

“Debbie downstairs heard it from her husband, who works with Ryan Dunstan, who’s dating Gillian Tate, who’s Facebook friends with Kandi,” Clarice explained. “It’s a small world, my friend.”

“She’s either really stupid or really vindictive,” I said.

Clarice chuckled. “Knowing the kind of women Blane dates, probably both.”

“Where is he today?” I asked.

“In court,” she answered. “An embezzlement case.”

“All right, well, gotta go. Thanks for the gossip. Catch you later, Clarice.”

Clarice gave me a finger wave and I headed to the elevator and back out to my car. It was warming up now and I rolled the window down, letting in the autumn breeze as I drove. I dropped off the packages for the law firms first before I headed to the courthouse.

I managed to find a spot on the street to park—miracle of miracles—and hustled inside.

“Kathleen! How’s it going on this fine day?” This was from Hank, one of the security guards at the courthouse. Hank was a tall, imposing black man with a teddy-bear disposition.

Why he became a security guard was beyond me. He was no more likely to tackle a bad guy than he would be to dropkick a puppy.

“It’s going good, Hank,” I said, stepping through the metal detector. “You?”

“Better now that you’re here,” he said with a grin. Hank was an incorrigible flirt.

“I bet you say that to all the girls,” I teased. It was almost impossible not to be in a good mood around Hank. He was always so cheerful.

“Just the pretty ones,” he retorted and I laughed. Grabbing my purse and my stack of files off the table where it had been searched, I headed down the hall.

The hallway was quiet and my steps echoed slightly as I walked. I was passing the various courtroom doors when suddenly one flew open, startling me. A man rushed out, furtively looking both ways in the nearly empty hallway before spotting me standing only feet away. He was wearing a suit but looked very bedraggled, like he’d slept in it or something, it was so wrinkled.

His eyes lit on me and he rushed toward me so fast I didn’t have time to react. In a moment he’d pulled my arm behind my back, my files dropping to the floor in a messy heap. I gasped in pain and shock as he pulled upward on my arm. Then he abruptly released my arm only to put a knife to my throat.

At that moment, the courtroom door burst open again and a crowd of people came rushing out. They froze when they saw the tableau before them. I heard someone scream down the hallway. The man behind me pulled me closer to him, and my hands came up to his arm, trying to hold the knife away from my throat. He was several inches taller than me and stronger, dragging me with him as he backed up to the wall.

Security guards rushed around the corner, guns drawn.

“Stay back!” the man holding me yelled. “Everybody stay back! Or I’ll kill her!”

Adrenaline and fear were pumping through my system and I could feel my heart pounding. The cold edge of the knife was pressed against my throat as he held me in a viselike grip. The security guards glanced at each other, clearly uncertain what to do. Behind them the crowd stood silently watching.

“I want to get out of here,” the man yelled, desperation evident in his voice. “I’m not going to jail! Let me out of here or she dies!” As if to emphasize his point, he pressed the knife harder against me and I felt the blade nick me slightly.

The pain from the wound served to clarify my jumbled thoughts. My father had taught me many things before he died, and being a victim had not been one of them. I took a deep breath.

In a sudden sharp movement, I grabbed the arm holding the knife with both my hands as I thrust my head backward away from the knife. Yanking down on his arm with all my strength, I twisted my body, moving under his arm and away from him. My new leverage shoved the knife back toward him, and a split second later, he collapsed, the knife embedded in his side.

I took a few steps before I started shaking and slowly slid to the floor, my legs no longer able to hold me. Shouting and movement were all around me now as the security guards surrounded the man and paramedics were called. I was having trouble breathing and spots danced in front of my eyes. While I’d known how to get away from such an attack in theory, until today I’d never needed to use that training. The reality of what had just happened was starting to seep in and I felt tears welling in my eyes as I struggled to catch my breath.

“Put your head between your knees.”

I heard the words but couldn't respond. The dots got bigger and my breathing shallower and more rapid. I felt someone pressing on my head, pushing it down insistently. When my head was between my knees, they stopped pushing but held me there. After a few moments, my breathing calmed and the spots disappeared. I tried to sit up and the hand moved away. Glancing upward, I saw a man standing there looking at me, a concerned expression on his face.

I nearly stopped breathing again. I didn't know if I should swoon or cower in fear. Towering over me stood a black-clad male with dark, wavy hair and piercing blue eyes. His brows were also dark and arched sharply, giving his face a slightly malevolent or mischievous look, it was hard to say which. A chiseled jaw and lips that would have made an artist weep completed the picture. I realized my mouth was hanging open and I wondered if I needed to put my head between my knees again.

Dropping down to a crouch so he was at my level, he spoke to me, looking carefully in my eyes. "Are you all right?"

I couldn't speak so I just nodded. Surely this had to be a figment of my imagination. Men like this didn't give me the time of day.

"You're bleeding," he said, reaching out and touching my neck. His fingers came away with blood on them.

"Just a scratch," I managed. His lips curved ever so slightly. I was mesmerized.

"Nice move," he said. "What you did to get away," he clarified at my questioning look.

"Thanks," I said. "Will he be okay?" I asked, jerking my head toward the man now surrounded by security and EMTs.

"Yeah," the stranger said. "The wound isn't deep and the medics got here quickly enough."

I closed my eyes in relief. Even if he had tried to kill me, the knife hitting him had been more accidental than planned.

When I opened my eyes, the man in black was gone. Dismayed, I looked around, but with the crowd of people, I didn't see him anywhere. I scrambled to my feet.

"Kathleen!" Hank was barreling toward me. "Holy shit! Are you okay?"

I reassured Hank, who was completely distraught that the man had managed to get in the building with a knife. Not that it was entirely his fault—it seemed the metal detector had been on the fritz earlier this morning. Surreptitiously, I kept watching for the stranger, but never saw him. I sighed. He could have been a figment of my imagination, for all I knew.

It was hours later before I was able to get back to the firm. The paramedics had wanted to check me out, the knife wound requiring only a bandage, thank God. Then there were police reports to fill out and a statement to make. It was now after six and the sun was setting.

Wind gusting through my car windows had blown my hair to pieces and I tried to comb it with my fingers, wishing I had a ponytail holder with me. My hair was long and strawberry blonde—and one of my best features, in my opinion. Not that I had a lot of great features. I was probably short but I preferred "vertically challenged." Ten pounds that I could never seem to lose made me a little too curvy, and I had one of those voices that was too high and too soft for anyone to really take me seriously.

I thought I'd stop by Clarice's desk before I headed home. She might still be around and I dearly needed just to chat for a few minutes. No one else was around when I reached her, tucked away by Blane's office in the corner. Clarice was typing at her computer, her eyes on the paper clipped to the side of her monitor as her fingers flew over the keyboard.

"Hey," I said quietly.

She jumped, startled at the interruption. When she saw who it was, she leapt to her feet. “Kathleen!” she exclaimed, throwing her arms around me in a tight hug. “I heard what happened. Thank goodness you’re okay!”

I hugged her back just as tightly. “Thanks, Clarice,” I said. “I’m all right.”

After a moment, she released me. “I can’t believe that happened,” she said, resuming her seat. I sank down in the matching chair opposite her.

“Yeah,” I said. “Pretty crazy.” I didn’t really want to talk about it. The cops had talked me all out. “How was your day?”

“Not as exciting as yours,” she said with a snort. “Just trying to get this file typed up for delivery to a client tonight. Blane faxed it to me last minute.” She glanced at her watch and sighed. “Jack and I were supposed to have dinner tonight. I guess I’ll call him and cancel.” Clarice was divorced with two kids. She had been dating Jack for several months now. He taught science at a local high school and, from the way she talked about him, seemed to be a really nice guy.

There were at least a dozen or more papers stacked on her desk that she had yet to transcribe. It was getting late and nearly everyone else had left to enjoy their weekend.

“Want me to do it for you?” I asked. “I don’t have any more runs and no plans tonight.”

She looked hopefully at me. “Really?”

I nodded.

“But I don’t want to impose,” she dithered. “Especially after all you’ve been through today. I should probably just cancel.”

“C’mon, Clarice,” I urged her, “it’s not a big deal. I’m fine and I have nothing better to do. You go on.”

I really didn’t mind. I liked doing things for people. And it wasn’t as if I had anything to go home to except an empty apartment and the harrowing memories of today. That thought depressed me, so I shoved it to the back of my mind and smiled brightly at Clarice.

“Go out and have fun,” I said, “I’ll take care of this.”

She still looked uncertain, but after glancing at her watch again, she gave in. Grabbing her purse from a drawer, she said, “Thanks so much, Kathleen. Just leave it on Blane’s desk when you’re through.”

Giving me a quick hug, she headed for the elevators and I sat down at her desk. Taking a look at where she’d left off, I started typing.

Typing had been one of the most useful classes I’d ever taken in high school and I was good at it, averaging around seventy-five words per minute. It was so quiet the only sounds I could hear were my fingers tapping the keys and the solemn ticking of the big grandfather clock that stood in the alcove by the elevators. It was relaxing, especially after the events of today, and I felt myself sort of drop into a zone.

This particular document was about a case the firm had taken awhile back defending a local union that serviced voting machines. During the last election, there had been reported cases of fraud, and the accusers had singled out the union as the perpetrators. It made for interesting reading even if quite a bit of it was legalese.

I wasn’t surprised at the famous names involved in the case—all people I recognized as being well known in Indianapolis. Blane’s career was high-profile in this city. While his social life made the lifestyle pages of the newspaper, his exploits as a lawyer often made the front page. Defense attorneys and trial lawyers had a reputation for being morally questionable and more showmen than men of substance, and I wasn’t sure where Blane fell in the mix, though no one questioned his ambition and drive.

“What are you doing?”

The words came from behind me and I let out a piercing shriek, so surprised was I by the interruption. I jumped up and whirled around, accidentally overturning the chair as I did so.

Blane was standing there looking as startled as I was. “Jesus!” he said, shoving a hand through his perfect hair. “What the hell was that for?”

“You scared me!” I said, embarrassment making me snappish. “You shouldn’t sneak up on people.”

“I didn’t sneak,” he replied matter-of-factly. “And you didn’t answer me. What are you doing?”

Still unnerved, I didn’t consider my words before they fell out of my mouth. “I’m typing, obviously,” I said, heavy on the smart-ass.

His eyes narrowed at that and I swallowed nervously, dropping my eyes to keep from having to meet his. It belatedly occurred to me that he was one of the owners and if I pissed him off, he might not be as lenient this time in whether or not to fire me.

Blane wasn’t dressed in his normal business attire but much more casually, in jeans that hugged his lean hips. Catching myself gazing at his crotch, I abruptly remembered his ex-girlfriend’s Facebook post and flushed. I jerked my eyes upward and saw he had on a black long-sleeved Henley with the sleeves pushed up his arms to just below his elbows. He had very nice, muscular forearms. Why was I staring at his forearms? Desperate for a safe place to look, I dropped my eyes to his shoes. His very nice, very expensive, very large shoes.

I cleared my throat and answered again, making my voice as pleasant as possible. “Clarice had plans, so I offered to help finish this for her.” I glanced up at him, but his expression was unreadable.

“Don’t you have plans for tonight, too?” he asked.

I shook my head, feeling my cheeks heat even more as I inwardly cursed my fair skin. Nervously, I looked back down at the papers. I was nearly done. Just needed to finish up, save, and print. When Blane didn’t say anything else, I turned away, righting my chair and resuming my seat before typing again.

The skin on the back of my neck seemed to prickle as he silently watched me. Finally, he moved past me into his office and I released the breath I’d been holding. Looking over what I had typed, I grimaced. I had to correct numerous typing errors. In my own defense, I never did well when someone was watching over my shoulder.

I finished up the document and printed it before gathering up my things to leave. Glancing into Blane’s office, I saw him working at his computer. Clarice had said to leave the document on his desk, so there was no avoiding talking to him.

Cautiously, I tapped on his office door. He glanced up from his computer and I hurried inside.

“Clarice said to leave these for you,” I said, handing him the file.

“Thank you,” he replied, returning his attention to his monitor.

I hesitated for a moment, but there didn’t seem to be anything else I should say and he wasn’t paying attention to me anyway, so I just headed for the elevator.

The night had gotten colder and I shivered as I unlocked my car and slid behind the wheel. I tossed my things on the passenger seat and shoved the key in the ignition. I turned the key and...nothing happened. I tried again. Same result. Two more times. Two more nothings.

My head dropped to the steering wheel and I groaned. It felt as if this day was never going to end. I would have dug out my cell phone, but I had one of those pay-as-you-go plans, which was currently out of minutes.

I sighed in defeat. I was going to have to go back inside and call a tow truck. Which cost money. Really didn't want to do that. And if I did go inside, that meant I'd have to see Blane again. Really, really didn't want to do that. I banged my forehead lightly against the steering wheel.

A tap at the window made me jerk upright and I stifled another shriek. Blane was standing outside my car. I couldn't roll the window down without the car being on, so I opened the door partway.

"Yeah?" I said, less than gracious at the interruption to my crap of a day.

"Car trouble?" he asked, jerking his head slightly toward my engine. The cold seemed to have no effect on him even as I started shivering again, the wind blowing my hair as I sat in the car.

"Guess so," I said miserably. I wondered if I could ask to borrow his cell phone so I didn't have to go all the way back inside, but then I figured he'd probably think I was an idiot for not having one of my own. I really didn't want to tell him about the pay-as-you-go thing. I doubted he would even know what that was.

"Need a lift?"

I instinctively recoiled from that. Blane made me nervous wreck. I no longer entertained romanticized notions of him—disdainful as I was of his callous approach to relationships and women—but he was a formidable, intelligent, and way too good-looking man. I'd no doubt do or say something idiotic out of sheer nerves. I shook my head.

"No, thanks," I replied. "I'll just call a tow truck or something."

"It's late and it's cold," Blane persisted firmly. "Let me take you home."

I still hesitated, wishing vile things on my car for choosing this night to give out on me.

"Come on," he said firmly, pulling the door open the rest of the way and grasping my upper arm. "I have to run an errand first, but I should be able to get you home before a tow truck would show up here."

I didn't see how I could refuse at this point without it seeming ridiculous, so I grabbed my things and got out of the car, locking it before shutting the door. Blane still had a hand on my arm as we walked to his car. This was the closest I had ever been to him while standing (I tried to ignore the memory of kneeling in front of him), and he was quite tall. The top of my head only came to his shoulder.

Blane led me to a car parked close to the building in one of the reserved spaces. I gasped when I saw it. He drove a black Jaguar with tinted windows. It suited him.

He opened the passenger door for me and waited until I'd gotten settled inside before shutting it. The leather seat was richly decadent to someone used to vinyl and I inhaled deeply. The car smelled of leather and Blane's cologne. Yum.

Blane climbed in the driver's side and I shivered again, though I didn't know if it was from the cold air or from how close he was to me in the confines of the car.

"Cold?" he asked, and I nodded wordlessly.

The engine purred to life and he pushed the button for the heater. Pulling out of the lot, he headed south on Meridian toward the center of the city.

There was something very masculine about a man driving a car like this one and I savored the experience of being in a beautiful, powerful car with an equally beautiful and powerful man. Blane might be a shameless womanizer, but I tried not to focus on that at the moment.

We did not converse and I watched out my windows as the houses lining the street flashed by, their lights muted.

After a while, Blane broke the silence. “Kathleen.” He said my name slowly, as if testing it out. “What’s your last name, Kathleen?”

I hesitated in telling him. People always teased me about my name. “Turner,” I finally mumbled, and waited for the jokes to begin. To my surprise, he didn’t immediately respond. I turned back to the window.

“Do you go by Kathy?” he asked, and I was forced to turn and look at him again.

“No.” I hated nicknames.

“Katie?”

Even worse. “No.”

“You prefer Kathleen,” he stated rather than asked.

“Yes.”

At another one-word response from me, his mouth curved sardonically. “You seem to be a woman of few words,” he said, glancing at me.

I hesitated. He was making me feel idiotic. “Sometimes,” I finally said stiffly.

He must have realized I was uncomfortable, because he switched tactics.

“We didn’t get off to a great start, Kathleen,” he said, and I felt the color leave my face. Please tell me he was not going to bring up that disastrous meeting where I planted my face in his crotch.

“Why don’t you tell me where you’re from?”

I let out a sigh of relief. He wanted to know my life story? Well, this should be a short conversation. “I’m from Rushville, Indiana,” I answered, “a small town east of here. I moved here six, seven months ago.”

“And what did you do in Rushville?” he asked, looking my way again.

His eyes did funny things to my insides when he was focused so intently on me like that. I thought he was just making idle conversation, but it seemed like he was actually interested in what I was going to say. I harshly reminded myself that he was very good at making people think that.

“Not much,” I said vaguely. “Tended bar. Took care of my mom.”

“Took care of your mom?” he repeated, questioning.

“She had cancer,” I said. It didn’t hurt as much now when I said it. I felt a twinge inside and a brief wave of grief that I was able to shake off.

“Did she...?” he left the rest of the sentence unsaid as I nodded.

“Two years ago now,” I answered his unasked question.

He paused. “I’m sorry,” he said quietly.

I didn’t say anything to that and resumed my study of the scenery passing by the window. I didn’t want him being nice to me and changing the preconceived notions I had. It would be too easy to become infatuated with a man like him, and also decidedly unwise, considering the female debris left in his wake.

“And the rest of your family?” he asked.

I turned back toward him, wondering why he was asking so many questions. Then I remembered; that was his job. Knowledge was power, or so Schoolhouse Rock! had always taught me.

“My dad was a cop,” I replied. “He was killed in the line of duty when I was fifteen.”

Blane didn’t say anything to that and, thankfully, stopped with the questions.

A few minutes later, we pulled up to the front of a building in a seedy part of town. It was headquarters for the union the firm was representing. Blane parked and opened the door. Before he got out, he turned to me.

“I’d say you could wait inside the car, but it’s not the best area,” he said.

“It’s not a problem,” I replied, getting out of the car. I shoved my hands into the pockets of my coat to protect them from the cold. Blane headed for the building and I followed a step or two behind.

The lobby of the building was deserted and I followed Blane down the hallway. He seemed to know where he was going. Pausing outside of a door, he rapped sharply on it. A muffled voice said to come in, and Blane pushed the door open.

We entered a nice office, nicer than I would have expected from the outside of the building, where two men were sitting on opposite sides of a desk, smoking cigars. The man behind the desk stood when Blane came in, a wide smile creasing his face. He was older, I’d say in his late fifties, with a receding hairline and expanding waistline. He exuded “used car salesman” and I took an instant dislike to him.

“Blane!” he exclaimed in a voice that was roughened by years of cigars. I detected an underlying Italian accent by way of Brooklyn. “Fantastic that you could get here tonight.” His eyes lit on me and I saw a gleam come into them. “Who is your lovely friend?” he asked.

Blane turned to me. “This is Kathleen,” he said. “She works for me. Kathleen, this is Frank Santini.”

I pasted a fake smile on my face and stepped forward to shake Frank’s hand. His name was familiar but I couldn’t place it. Frank removed the cigar from his mouth briefly, took my hand in his, and pressed his wet lips to it. Eww. I tried to conceal my grimace of distaste.

“It’s a pleasure, Kathleen,” Frank said, still holding my hand.

I nodded and kept smiling as I slid my hand out of his grip and sidled backward a bit so I was behind Blane. Frank gave me the creeps. I glanced at the other man, still sitting in the overstuffed leather chair watching us. He took another drag of the cigar as his eyes met mine, and he didn’t smile.

“I brought the file with the affidavit summary you requested,” Blane said, handing the file in his hand to Frank. “I’m not sure why it was so urgent that you had to have it this evening.” His statement hung in the air, the question unasked but there nonetheless.

“I spoke with Bill about it,” Frank said, shrugging off Blane’s question as he rounded the desk, tossing the envelope onto its surface. I assumed he was referring to William Gage, the senior partner of the firm, though I’d never heard anyone refer to the older man as “Bill.” He didn’t seem to be the type of person who would go by that; it was always “William” or “Mr. Gage.”

“We’d like a quick word with you,” the man in the chair said. “Alone, if you wouldn’t mind.” He shot a pointed look in my direction. He was about the same age as Frank and could have been his brother, their physical similarities were so pronounced. But while Frank was friendly, perhaps overly so, this man was decidedly not.

“Jimmy can take her outside,” he said, motioning to the door. I turned my head and saw a third man in the room, who had escaped my notice. He was standing in the shadows and now stepped forward into the dim light cast by the lamp on the desk. I felt my eyes widen and I instinctively stepped closer to Blane.

Jimmy was tall and thin, gaunt even. The hollowness under his pronounced cheekbones emphasized the darkness of his eyes and brows. His lips were thin and I could see a faint scar

that ranged from the tip of his eyebrow down the side of his face. His appearance wasn't the worst of it. Jimmy reeked of menace and his eyes were cold, hard chips of granite.

He stepped toward me and I looked at Blane, my eyes wide. Blane's face was grim but he gave me a curt nod. I took that as a signal that I didn't have a choice in the matter. Swallowing heavily and despite my trepidation, I preceded Jimmy out the door and into the hallway. I heard the door shut firmly behind me.

There was nowhere to go but forward, so I walked, feeling Jimmy close behind me. The hairs on the back of my neck stood up as he silently followed me out to the lobby. There were a few chairs and a couch scattered around, so I sank into a chair. Jimmy eyed me for a moment, then sat in the chair next to me.

He stared at me and I could feel my hands get sweaty and my heart rate increase. Jimmy was making me extremely uncomfortable. I glanced at him a couple of times out of the corner of my eye as I fidgeted. My nervousness made me want to babble. Maybe if I got him to talk, he wouldn't seem so intimidating.

"So," I said a little too brightly, "what do you do here?"

He stared at me, unblinking. "I take care of problems," he finally said, his accent much thicker than Frank's.

Okay, well that wasn't much to go on. "What kind of problems?" I asked.

He smiled and it sent a chill down my spine. "People problems," he answered.

I decided I didn't need to know any more about Jimmy. I smiled weakly at him and looked around nervously for a magazine or something.

"You're not going to be a problem, are you?" he asked and I jerked my head around to face him. The way he was looking at me made my stomach turn to knots.

I shook my head, unable to say anything.

"Good," he said, "because I'd hate to have to mess up that pretty face."

Okay, now I was getting seriously freaked out. I could think of nothing to say to this and I prayed Blane would come out so we could leave.

"Knock it off, Jimmy," I heard and turned to see Blane standing a few feet away.

I heaved a sigh of relief. It was the first time I had ever been glad to see him. Compared to Jimmy, my fear of Blane seemed ridiculous. I jumped to my feet as Blane strode toward us. Jimmy stood as well and didn't move as Blane approached. Jimmy was several inches shorter than Blane.

"You got a problem, Kirk?" Jimmy asked snidely. I noticed he was now playing with a switchblade that he must've pulled out of a pocket, but he'd done it so fast, I hadn't seen him.

Blane's fingers wrapped around my upper arm as he tugged me behind him. "Stay away from her, Jimmy," he gritted out, low and threatening.

They stared each other down for a minute. I watched, barely breathing. Finally, Jimmy smirked. "Watch your back, Kirk," he said. He flipped the knife open and shut, and then it disappeared. Whether it had gone in a pocket or up his sleeve, I couldn't tell. Jimmy backed off, heading back the way we'd come.

Blane hustled me toward the door, passing several offices along the way, which were all darkened. We were halfway to his car, me struggling to keep up with his long strides, when his tight grip on my arm became too much.

Wincing, I said "You're hurting me." His hold immediately loosened and he slowed his steps.

“Sorry,” he said tersely, glancing behind us at the now-ominous building. We reached his car and he had me inside and himself behind the steering wheel in seconds.

I was still frightened, not only from the encounter with Jimmy, but from Blane’s reaction as well. “Who was that guy?” I managed to ask as Blane drove us out of the lot.

His jaw tightened before he answered. “He’s called Jimmy Quicksilver. His real name is James Lafaso.”

I was afraid to ask but couldn’t help myself. “Why is he called Jimmy Quicksilver?”

“Because he’s good with knives,” Blane answered, his eyes on the road.

I knew what Blane meant without him having to elaborate and remembered Jimmy saying how he’d hate to mess up my face. I felt queasy and this news did nothing to ease my mind. Shakily, I lifted a hand to rub my forehead, wondering how my relatively dull and mundane life had suddenly become like a James Bond movie in the space of a little over twelve hours.

“You all right?” Blane asked and his eyes were concerned as he glanced at me.

“Um...yeah,” I said hesitantly. “I guess so.” What was I supposed to say?

Blane stopped the car and I looked around. I had completely forgotten to tell him where I lived and hadn’t been paying attention to where he’d been driving. We were parked near a restaurant downtown that I’d never been to, mainly because I couldn’t afford it, but also because it was the kind of place you didn’t go by yourself.

“Why are we here?” I asked as Blane turned off the car.

He looked at me and I had to catch my breath again, he was so close. His green eyes studied my face, dropping briefly to my lips.

“I thought you might be hungry,” he said finally, his eyes meeting mine again. “And I could use a drink.”

He stepped out of the car, leaving me with my jaw hanging open. Before I could recover from my surprise, he was at my door, holding it open for me.

As he took my elbow to go inside the restaurant, I wondered if this day could get any stranger.

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