

# The Devil Drinks Coffee

## Chapter 1

If it wasn't for the damn pig . . .

I shook my head as I looked out the window at mirror-like waves rising off the road. It was one hundred and two degrees—the hottest day of the year so far—and I was roasting.

Branson Falls, Utah, has a total of two stoplights. Since catching jaywalkers and light runners is one of the only things for Branson cops to do, Officer Bob had been hiding out between The Snow Cone Hut and Movie Mayhem like a turtle in a Crown Victoria shell. I didn't see him until after I zoomed through a mostly yellow light on the way to cover my next big story: the birth of a bright purple pig.

It had taken Bob a mile to catch up, and me another mile to realize Bob had purposely turned his lights and siren on—I was surprised he knew where the buttons were located. I finally pulled over in front of the Branson convenience store, also known as the den of iniquity that sells beer, condoms, and coffee.

Like me, my Jeep Grand Cherokee doesn't handle heat waves well, so I'd turned the engine off when Officer Bob stopped me. But I could see him relaxing in his idling, air-conditioned squad car, and I was getting angrier by the minute. There sat Bob, comfortable as could be, while the hair on my arms started to singe and the back of my legs glued themselves to my sticky leather seat. I was hot, cranky, and late for an important appointment with a pig. It was time to get proactive.

I got out of my Jeep as a jacked-up black Ford truck with tinted windows roared past me at breakneck-speed and careened down the road. I scowled at the truck, angry that I'd been pulled over when, clearly, the truck driver needed a speeding ticket. Officer Bob seemed unconcerned, however, so I went back to my original plan. I pulled my v-neck sky blue shirt down and crossed my arms under my chest, propping my boobs up. If college taught me one thing, it was how to use boob manipulation. With the girls at their perkier, I walked up to Officer Bob's door and pasted on my most charming smile before bending down to look at Bob. His round cheeks and gradually receding hairline made him seem older than he was. He was taking great effort to ignore me so I knocked on his window to the tune of shave-and-a-haircut.

Unable to overlook me any longer, Bob pressed the automatic window button. As the glass rolled down, a merciful wave of cool air hit me from inside his car. “I could arrest you for gettin’ out of your car, you know.” He said it like he thought he was Eric Cartman from *South Park*. I half expected him to flash his badge and tell me to “respect his authoritah.”

“Arrest me for what?”

“Standin’ there. You’re threatenin’ me. I could Taser you.”

“I’m threatening you?” I held my palms out to show him I wasn’t holding anything. “With what?”

“It doesn’t matter what you’re usin’,” he said, trying to pull his eyes away from my chest. “I just have to feel like you’re a threat.” He started fiddling with a black leather pouch on his belt, which he seemed to be having a problem opening because he had to detour around his stomach to get the pouch unlatched.

I put my hands on the window seal and leaned into the squad car. “Bobby Burns,” I said with a warning glare, “if you even think about using a stun gun on me, you’ll be the star of a front page news story about police misconduct.”

Bobby pointed at me with a pudgy finger. “That’s another threat.”

“No, it’s a promise. I’m the editor of the *Tribune*, Bobby. You probably shouldn’t get on my bad side.” I couldn’t tell if the sweat on his upper lip was the result of fear, or the heat seeping into his squad car now that the window was down. I decided to appeal to his sense of nostalgia. “Look, Bobby. We grew up together. You’re a nice guy. I only moved back to Branson a few weeks ago and I’m late for a story. I need to get to the Crandall farm before their pig turns back to a normal color. What do I have to do to get out of here without a ticket?” Since the manager at McDonald’s makes more money than me, I really couldn’t afford a ticket and was willing to listen to any alternatives.

Bobby pulled his aviator sunglasses down slightly, looking at me over the top of the frame. “Are you tryin’ to bribe me?”

“No! I’m trying to do my job.”

“Too bad. Bribin’ might’ve worked.”

At that moment, a static voice crackled from Bobby’s police radio, “All units needed immediately at Emerald Lake. A body—” Bobby reached over faster than any turtle should be able to move and turned the radio volume down.

He glanced at me while he fastened his seat belt. “Looks like it’s your lucky day, Kate. I gotta go.”

I looked from Officer Bob to the radio, tightening my hands on his open window. “What’s going on, Bobby?”

He shook his head and started his squad car. “Can’t tell ya, just thank your stars you didn’t get a ticket.”

With that, he hit the button to roll up the window. I stepped back as he shifted the car into gear and his tires squealed as he sped away.

I wasn’t about to let him leave without me though. I’d heard enough to know there was a body at Emerald Lake, and I was going to find out why. I jumped in my Jeep and followed Officer Bob.

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Emerald Lake is usually a popular recreation spot for Branson residents, but today, police cars, ambulances, and the coroner’s car were scattered across the park.

A body had been pulled from the lake and was now lying on the ground covered by a stark white sheet. Water slowly seeped through the colorless fabric. I moved in closer, trying to get a better look. Officer Bob stepped in front of me putting his hand up, palm out, to stop me before I could get around the police tape.

“Hey, Bobby. Long time no see,” I said. “If you’re here, who’s on light duty?”

“Dagnabbit, Kate! You weren’t supposed to follow me.”

“Yeah. Bad timing that you were pulling me over when you got that call. Want to tell me what happened and let me take a look around?” I held up my camera trying to appeal to his sense of importance. “I’ll quote you in the paper and take your photo.”

He shook his head. “Can’t do it. We’re conductin’ a serious investigation.”

“Bobby,” I said, trying to reason with him. “This is probably the biggest news story in Branson history! I need to know what happened and I need to get some photos.”

“You can get photos after the body’s taken away.”

“I wasn’t going to take photos of the body! Geez, what kind of person do you think I am?”

Bobby wrinkled his nose. “You’re part of the liberal media. Can’t be trusted.”

I rolled my eyes. “I’m a reporter for the *Branson Tribune*, Bobby. I don’t have an agenda. Come on, there has to be something I can do to get past the police tape.”

“Sorry, Kate,” he said, rubbing his thumb over his badge like he was trying to shine it. “Can’t do it.”

We each held our ground, glaring at each other in some sort of staring standoff until I heard a deep voice say, “That’s fine, officer, she’s with me.”

Bobby glanced behind me and seemed to wither before my eyes. I turned around to see a tall, broad shouldered man with sandy brown hair, tan skin, and hard green eyes stroll up next to me. Bobby took an immediate step back, clearly intimidated.

I was a little unsettled myself, but mostly confused. “I am?”

He cocked his head, giving me a half smile. “You are,” he confirmed.

He flashed some sort of badge at Bobby. Bobby clenched his jaw and then relented. “All right, you can go.” He pointed at me. “But if I get in trouble for this from the chief, you’re gonna owe me a favor.”

I nodded as I passed through the barrier, smiling at the back of the man who could easily be a model—or the leader of a Black Ops team. The guy was dressed in gray cargo pants, black combat boots, and a dark blue tee shirt he filled out nicely. I could see the bottom half of a black tattoo on his bicep and kept mentally reminding myself to breathe as I caught up with him.

“I’m sorry,” I said, “but, I’m not sure who you are.”

He stopped, turned, and looked at me in a way that demanded all of my attention. “I’m Ryker Hawkins. People call me Hawke.”

The name didn’t ring a bell—and he was definitely someone I would have remembered. “I’m Kate Saxee,” I said, holding out my hand. He shook it firmly at first, but then softened his grip, letting his hand linger.

“I know,” he said.

I stared at him, wondering what else he knew. He gently slid his hand out of mine.

“And why did you decide to help me get into the crime scene, Mr. Hawkins?”

The corners of his mouth twitched. “It’s just Hawke,” he said. “And I helped you because I think we both have skills that could be mutually beneficial to each other.” His gaze slid up and down my body as he said it.

I narrowed my eyes. It didn't seem like he was talking about work skills at all.  
"Professional skills, right?"

He glanced down and gave me a smile that could only be described as naughty. I folded my arms across my chest in an attempt to hide my boobs. It was obvious he was well-aware of my assets and I wouldn't need them for any manipulation. "What do you do?"

"Today I'm a P.I.," he answered.

"You're a private investigator?" I asked. "And what do you mean by 'today'?"

His lips lifted in a slow smile. "I can be anything you want me to be," he said as his eyes darkened and my mouth fell open, "but these days I do a lot of contract work."

I picked my jaw up. "Contract work like you own a business, right? Not contract work like you kill people?"

He didn't answer, but leaned into me and smiled again instead. Hawke was only inches away and he smelled like a combination of salt, soap, and the beach. I closed my eyes as I took in the sexy scent that had overpowered all of my common sense. When I opened them again, he was watching me with an amused expression. It was obvious he'd noticed me trying to inhale him so it seemed like I should say something. "You smell really good," I murmured weakly.

"It's called Swagger."

I lifted my brow. "I bet it is."

He looked past me before settling his gaze on my face again. "You want to find out whose body is under that sheet or what?"

"Yes!"

"Stay here for a minute. I'll be back."

I'm not in the habit of letting people tell me what to do, but Hawke seemed to have more connections than me, and I didn't want to get kicked out of the crime scene.

Hawke talked to a few cops and the guy in the coroner's shirt, then disappeared for a few minutes before coming back. "The coroner is going to take the body soon. Once they're gone, you can get photos."

"Thanks," I said. "Whose body is it?"

"Can I trust you not to release the name or harass the family?"

"What a silly question."

He gave me a level stare. "Is that a yes, or no?"

“Yes, you can tell me.”

“It’s a teenage girl. The police will most likely rule the death an accidental drowning. Her name was Chelsea Bradford.”

## Chapter 2

I gasped as soon as I heard the name. The Bradfords live in the same neighborhood as my parents. They moved in after I left for college, but I'd seen them around town when I was home during school breaks. Chelsea's mom was a housewife and her dad owned a few successful businesses.

"Did you know her?" Hawke asked.

I shook my head. "Not personally. They live near my parents though."

He nodded like that wasn't a surprise. "The coroner thinks Chelsea's been dead for about ten hours," he said. "The police seem pretty sure that her death was an accident, but I think there's more to the story. I think someone might have wanted to hurt Chelsea."

I studied his face for a moment. "Why would you think that?"

He caught my gaze and held it. "Call it a hunch."

"A hunch?" I widened my eyes. "You expect me to just trust the *hunch* of some life-size G.I. Joe figurine?"

He grinned. "I'm trusting a woman who seems to think she's Lois Lane, so yeah."

Since Lois and I were both damn good reporters, I wasn't insulted by the reference. "Seriously, you've got to give me more than "call it a hunch." What do you know that I don't?"

His eyes narrowed slightly. I could tell he was trying to decide exactly how much he wanted to say. "There are things that don't add up."

"Like what?"

"Well, since her time of death puts her here at two in the morning, I'd like to know what a seventeen-year-old girl was doing at Emerald Lake in the middle of the night. I'm also curious why her parents didn't know she was here." He paused, glancing around the park before settling his eyes back on me and deciding to continue. "Also—and this is just between you and me—when I saw her body—"

"You saw the body?" I interrupted. "How did that happen?"

"I'm kind of—"

"Intimidating?" I offered.

"I was going to say persuasive."

I tilted my head to the right in agreement.

“Some of her wounds look like they were defensive. That means she wasn’t out here alone, and her death wasn’t accidental.”

I watched Hawke steadily as I thought about his concerns. The defensive wounds were disturbing. And the possibility of a murder in Branson Falls? People here rarely die of anything except old age and boredom. A murdered teenage girl would be even more shocking. Not to mention that if news about a potential murderer on the loose got out, pandemonium would strike and people would barricade themselves in their basements. “That seems like a lot of evidence. So why are the police ruling it an accidental drowning?”

“That’s what I’d like to find out.”

Hawke seemed to know what he was talking about. Everything he mentioned definitely warranted further research. “Okay,” I conceded. “You have some good points.”

He looked around at the scene. The crowd of Branson residents was getting bigger as the news spread that a body had been found. “I can help you investigate this story.”

I was surprised and a little bewildered at the offer. “How?” I asked.

“I have resources that give me access to information.”

“Then why not just investigate by yourself? What do you need me for?”

“You have resources I don’t,” he said, looking me over again, his eyes lingering on my curves. I should have been offended, but I was actually a little flattered. I’d never had a guy like Hawke pay attention to me before. “You’re also well-known and respected in Branson Falls. In a small town like this, respect and personal history is important.”

I snorted. “I don’t know about the respected part, but I’m definitely well-known. I haven’t been to church in years.” I looked at him and he looked back. It occurred to me he probably hadn’t been to church—any church—ever, which made him even more of a reprobate than me. “What’s in this for you?”

“I told you, I do contract work. My clients are private but suffice it to say, you and I both have an interest in this particular case.”

“I’d like to know what your interest is.”

“And I’m not going to tell you. My offer’s on the table—you can take it or leave it.”

I took him in with my eyes from head to toe and decided to agree to the partnership because I thought two heads would be better than one—and because I didn’t want to pass up the

chance to ogle his ass or smell his ‘swagger.’ I put my hand out and he met it with his. “It’s a deal.”

We exchanged contact information before Hawke left to speak with more of the police officers. I walked around talking to officers, taking notes, and getting photos.

I had just finished trying to get more information out of Bobby—it didn’t work—when Hawke walked over to me. “The funeral should happen sometime in the next week. I’ll stop by your office so we can figure out our next step.”

I nodded. “I’ll see you then.” I watched Hawke walk to a sexy dark blue 1967 GT Shelby Mustang with two thick white racing stripes running up the hood, over the roof, and down the trunk. He fired up the loudest engine I’d ever heard, and the only thing interesting enough to turn the heads of Branson residents away from the scene of Chelsea Bradford’s death. As he threw the Mustang into gear and sped out of the park, I had the fleeting thought that contract work must pay a lot more than the salary of a small town newspaper editor.

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Branson Falls sits in a sheltered valley in eastern Utah, surrounded by the picturesque Rocky Mountains. Summers are sweltering, winters are freezing, and much to the chagrin of every Branson kid, school doesn’t get canceled unless a storm drops at least two feet of snow. The county fair is the social event of the year, high school sports teams are celebrated with a fervor usually reserved for Olympians, and town events are announced on hand-painted paper signs that hang between two street lights over the middle of Main Street. With less than five-thousand residents, it’s a place where everyone knows everyone, and gossip is the only form of entertainment. Most people own police scanners, so today, a good chunk of Branson residents were standing behind the police tape at Emerald Lake.

As I surveyed the crowd, I saw people I’d known growing up. The mayor spoke to a group, some of whom I recognized from City Council meetings. The bowery by the lake was decorated in red, white and blue. It looked like there’d been a political event going on here when Chelsea’s body was found. As I studied the people around the mayor, my eyes caught on the profile of a man wearing a white polo shirt. He turned to shake hands with someone and recognition set in as I tried not to fall over. Dylan Drake. Lawyer turned district representative for the state House of Representatives, most eligible bachelor in Branson—if not Utah—and my

teenage crush. He looked my way with eyes so blue they'd make the ocean jealous and I caught my breath before I dropped straight to the ground, pretending I'd lost something.

Drake is five years older than me and the biggest womanizer in the state—which is saying something since Utah was built by polygamists. Like every other girl who'd set eyes on him, I'd fallen in lust with Dylan Drake. Unlike every other girl, he'd never really known I existed, and most of the experiences I'd had with him had been in my mind. He knew the cheerleaders though. If the rumors were true—and I was pretty sure they were—he'd acknowledged the hell out of every cheerleader he ever met. And I was no cheerleader.

Hiding on the ground in plain sight isn't very inconspicuous and I was bound to start attracting attention soon; I just didn't want it to be from Drake. I wasn't sure I was ready to talk to him yet, considering our complete lack of history and all. Luckily I have reflexes like a fox and my evasive hide-like-a-child maneuver seemed to be working.

After a minute, I stood slowly, doing a quick Drake-check, then put my notebook in my purse while I looked for my keys as I walked to my Jeep. I still needed to visit the Crandall's pig before I could get started on the stories about Chelsea's death. My key search and rescue mission took longer than expected—which is probably the reason I didn't notice the nest of vipers I'd walked into until I was surrounded.

The Ladies. The most feared group of women in town.

They have houses they can't afford, spend their time gossiping and judging everyone they meet, and have no job to speak of except to stay the trophy wives their husbands married. They're Branson's version of *The Real Housewives* and many of them spent high school ridiculing everything from my hair to my clothes size. I try to avoid The Ladies as often as possible, though it's not easy when they're slowly circling me.

I couldn't leave without acknowledging them, so I plastered a fake smile on my lips and placed my left leg to the side while pointing my toe to create the illusion that I was lean. I'd learned that gem of information from watching the Miss America Pageant my entire life.

I did a quick scan of the women, immediately recognizing two I'd gone to high school with: Jackie Wall, the ringleader of The Ladies, and her sidekick, Amber Kane. Jackie was only three years older than me and had somehow climbed to the top of The Lady ladder fast. I imagined it had to do with Jackie knowing an incriminating piece of gossip some of the other Ladies didn't want to slip.

I greeted Amber first. “Hi,” I said with a toothy smile. I noticed her makeup was so heavily applied it looked like it came from a theater supply store. Her blonde hair was frizzy from over-processing, and her long acrylic nails were painted blood red, reminding me of talons fresh off a kill. “It’s been a while.”

Amber responded with a twist of her lips that was more scowl than smile. “Kate.” I watched her for a few seconds wondering if she was going to say more, but it became clear she was done talking to me. I must not meet her Lady standards.

I turned my attention to Jackie instead. As far as style was concerned, she and Amber could be twins. “Hello, Jackie,” I said, then nodded toward the others like I was acknowledging mob members, “Ladies.” Some of the women in the group nodded in return.

Jackie greeted me with a short, “Kate.” She gave a rehearsed smile and asked, “When will we be seeing you at church?”

Ninety percent of Branson Falls residents are Mormons. This means the majority of people in town are right-wing Republicans who, according to the edicts of their church, aren’t allowed to swear, smoke, gamble, consume alcohol, drink coffee, watch R-rated movies, or have premarital sex. Of course, just because their religion gives them these rules, it doesn’t mean they always follow them. And there are usually a few people—like high school football team heroes named Drake—who have their blatant sinning overlooked.

Having no vices seems pretty boring to me and though I’d once been a member of the Mormon Church, I’d left the religion in college, along with my virginity. “I’m not Mormon anymore,” I answered.

The Ladies gave a collective gasp as Jackie pursed her lips. “Oh,” she said, sticking her nose so high in the air that I had a front row seat to her sinuses. “Well, it’s only a matter of time until you come back to the fold.” She paused and waited for me to respond, but I knew there was no arguing with people like Jackie. When I didn’t answer, Jackie tilted her head toward the police officers still working by the lake. “Do you know what happened?”

Hawke had said the police were ruling Chelsea’s death an accidental drowning. I didn’t see any harm in telling Jackie that much. “They think it’s a drowning.”

Jackie’s eyes widened as murmurs started to rumble through the rest of the group. “Tragic,” she said with a shake of her head. “Do they know who it was?”

She should have known better than to ask. “The police aren’t releasing the name until they notify family members.”

Jackie nodded, slightly curving her mouth. “Surely *you* know though.”

I smiled back. “You can read about it in the *Tribune*.”

Jackie locked her jaw. Obviously, she wasn’t used to not getting her way. “We’ll do that.” She glanced at Amber, exchanging some sort of silent communication before turning back to me. “So,” she said, her lips forming a mixture of a smile and a sneer, “you’ve been gone for what, seven years now? What brought you back to Branson, Kate?” Her voice was full of faux concern meant to be cutting. “We thought you might actually try to make something of yourself, but last we heard, you were *living* with some guy.” She said “living” like she meant sinning . . . which, in the eyes of most Branson residents, was the same thing.

My stomach twisted as I exhaled slowly. I could tell this conversation would be about as pleasant as a bikini wax. “We broke up,” I answered, trying to keep my face blank and give as little information as possible. The pang of regret that hit me wasn’t because of my failed relationship. Instead, it was disappointment that my life hadn’t gone as I’d planned. I was supposed to be traveling the world as a famous journalist. Now I was back in the town I’d spent the first eighteen years of my life trying to get away from because it was the one place I thought I could regroup.

Jackie’s voice pulled me out of my past. “Well, no wonder your relationship didn’t work out. You can’t expect the Lord to bless a sinful union.” I found this amusing since Jackie was recently divorced. In Branson, divorce is sandwiched between murder and premarital sex on the sin scale. Apparently Jackie didn’t notice my smirk because she kept talking, “It will take time, but I’m sure someday you’ll find someone willing to overlook your . . . indiscretions, and give you another chance.”

There were a lot of reasons my relationship hadn’t worked out, the top being that my ex-boyfriend had wanted a *Stepford Wife* instead of a woman with a mind of her own. When he realized I was lacking in the “docile and submissive” department and had instead been gifted with an abundance of “sassy,” we’d come to a mutual agreement that things weren’t going to work out. I bit my tongue in a valiant effort to keep myself from telling Jackie exactly what I thought. As I tried to compose a profanity-free response in my head, I felt a hand caress my

lower back. Not just touch, caress. A hush fell over The Ladies and I heard a low, strong male voice say, “Hello, Ladies. Good to see you all.”

“H-h-hello,” Jackie stammered out in a breathy voice.

I turned my head slowly and came face-to-face with Dylan Drake. It’s a good thing I had so many Ladies flanking me or I might have collapsed straight to the ground like a female Gumby—and this time, the floor drop routine wouldn’t have been on purpose.

He met my eyes as blood rushed to my cheeks, then he looked back at Jackie and The Ladies. “If you don’t mind, I need to talk to Katie.”

I stared in dumbfounded silence. Until that moment, I’d wondered if Drake had mistaken me for someone else. I wasn’t sure how he knew me; like I said, I was *not* a cheerleader.

Jackie’s gaze tracked over Drake’s arm to his hand resting on my back. She gave me a swift scowl before flashing Drake a wide smile. “Of course, Dylan. I’m sure you need to discuss this incident and how to handle it in the paper.” She put her arm out, gesturing to the lake and police cars. “Kate hasn’t lived here for so long that she’s practically an outsider. She could definitely benefit from someone with your experience.”

“Oh,” Drake said, flashing me a sly smile, “I don’t doubt it.” He turned back to Jackie. “I’ll do my best to help her out. Have a good day, Ladies.” He steered me away, his hand still on my back as we walked.

### Chapter 3

Before today, the last time I saw Drake I was an awkward eighteen-year-old and he was home from college for Christmas break. I'd sat in the corner of the Chinese restaurant with my friends, giggling and blushing, simultaneously desperate for and terrified of him giving me any attention. Now I was awkward and twenty-five, but my Wonderbra gave me confidence my eighteen-year-old self would have killed for.

In the seven years since I'd seen him, Drake had only expanded his charm. And he was hot. Hotter than I remembered. He had a sexiness to him that only comes with experience—which he'd probably been getting since age twelve. The thick and wavy dark brown hair, strong jaw, and hard body didn't hurt either.

Seeing him up close gave me the overwhelming urge to rip his shirt off, but every available woman in the state—and probably some unavailable ones too—had personal experience with his charm and I was determined not to be added to that list. I took a deep breath and with it inhaled the stormy scent of Drake's cologne—then fought not to close my eyes and breathe it in again. I gathered my composure and locked eyes with him. There were hundreds of questions running through my head, but I asked the most obvious. “What did you need to talk to me about?”

He grinned. “Nothing, really. I was just rescuing you from The Ladies.”

I thinned my eyes. It had felt like I was surrounded by a pack of wild animals; apparently it had looked that way too. “Did I seem like I needed saving?”

Drake stopped and put his hands in his pockets as the corner of his mouth twitched. His eyes sparkled while he watched me, clearly entertained. “I saw you fall earlier and thought you might be having some sort of fit. Spending time with The Ladies would just exacerbate the problem so I decided I'd better intervene.”

Damn. He'd seen me trying to evade him. Luckily, I'd played the part of “chorus member” in my high school production of *The Music Man*, and my awesome acting skills were about to be called into action. “Fall?” I pushed my bottom lip out and furrowed my brow like I was trying to figure out what he was talking about. “Oh!” My eyes widened. “You mean when I dropped my pen.”

His lips curved in a half smile like he knew exactly why I'd dropped to the ground, but instead of pushing it, he changed the subject. "I saw your byline in the paper. I guess that means you're back in town for good. And you're a reporter now?"

"Editor, actually." I held out my hand, since we'd never been formally introduced. "I'm Kate Saxee. And you're a politician."

He took my hand as he flashed his trademark smile, the reason he was so good at politics—and women. "I know who you are," he said. "Politicians and journalists don't always get along, but for you, I would make an exception."

I reclaimed my hand, cocking my head to the side. "You mean because journalists tell the truth about what lying scumbags politicians are?"

He lifted his lips in a polite smile. "Tell me what you really think, Katie."

I loathe the name Katie. "It's Kate," I said, the annoyance making my legs less rubbery than they would have normally been in this situation.

He rocked back on his heels, smiling again. "We should catch up." He paused like he was gaging my reaction. "You know, since we'll probably be working together at some point." I nodded slowly, suspicious. Catch up? My entire history with Drake consisted of him patting me on the head after football games like I was a golden retriever. He must be remembering another girl. "I'll stop by the *Tribune* this week, so we can . . . talk."

I watched him steadily. This entire encounter had seemed a lot like flirting, and now he was setting up appointments that sounded like dates. Unfortunately, I wasn't sixteen anymore and no amount of lust could overrule the voice in my head telling me not to get involved with a player like Drake. I was trying to come up with a reply when a voice started belting out "Forever in Blue Jeans." I looked around trying to figure out who would be singing at an accident scene, then realized the voice was coming from my purse and my fancy new smart phone. That's right, I'm a Neil Diamond fan, and it took me a long time to admit it.

Drake cocked an eyebrow. "Interesting ringtone. Is that who I think it is?" I fumbled in my purse for the phone so I could silence it. Somehow, the speaker just kept getting louder, which made Drake even more intrigued. "I'm pretty sure the last time I heard that song was during a campaign visit at the nursing home."

I shook my head as I finally found the phone and pointed it at him. "You should respect Neil. Bad things happen to people who don't."

“Yeah,” he agreed. “I’ve heard it’s pretty tough to outrun senior citizens in sequined shirts.”

I glared at him as I answered the phone. “Hey, Spence,” I said. “Hold on for a second.” I put my hand over the speaker and looked at Drake. “As much as I’d like to stay here and continue our witty banter, I have work to do.”

He nodded, still smiling about the song. “It was good to talk to you, *Katie*,” he said just to aggravate me. “I’m sure we’ll be seeing a lot of each other.”

I looked over my shoulder as I walked away. “My name is Kate.”