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A Political Affair

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CHAPTER 1

“Fifty-two. Forty-eight. Fifty-two. Forty-eight. Fifty-two. Forty-eight.” Senator Stephen McEvoy chanted the numbers to the rhythm of his morning run through Rock Creek Park. His mantra worried him, so he tried to find comfort in the birds’ inspirational chirps, but the speeding cars drowned out their optimism. Stephen had to agree with his campaign

manager. The numbers weren’t good.

When Patty told him their latest poll results, she’d warned, “Fifty-

two/forty-eight is too close for comfort for a sitting senator up for reelection.”

“I know.” The two words were loaded with remorse.

Patty wasn’t just his campaign manager—she was also his sister, and she sighed at their predicament. “This wouldn’t happen to Dad.”

“I know.”

There wasn’t anything else to say. He knew she wasn’t blaming him any more than she blamed herself. Politics was a McEvoy family duty, and they were all in it together, though the mantle weighed heaviest on Stephen. It was always assumed he’d take over his father’s senate seat, but no one expected it so soon, least of all him.

Throughout the morning, the poll numbers kept him preoccupied. Even during the daily meeting with his circle of senior advisors, he tuned out. As his chief of staff, Greg Miller, reviewed the day’s legislation on the Senate floor, Stephen dwelled on how the world judged him. He swiveled his father’s creaky old chair to look out the window.

The view was impressive. The Supreme Court building stood floors below him, but it still towered over the tourists taking their proud photos.

He often wondered about the people who made up the term “the general public.” Polls reflected their opinions about him, yet they knew so little. If they really knew him, would they feel differently?

“Did you hear, boss?” Greg asked in earnest.

“Yes,” Stephen answered as though he’d been listening intently. He turned in his seat toward Greg. “It sounds like there are a lot of amendments to that bill.”

“Yeah, you’ll love this. Monroe is going after LIHEAP again. Can you believe it?” Greg smirked and looked around the room as if to encourage everyone to bring Stephen out of his funk. “Pierce is offering an amendment against it. We’re signing on, right?”

“Absolutely.” Stephen nodded, crossing his arms. “Great idea. Let’s cut off the heat to poor people right before winter. Tell Pierce’s staff I’ll do anything he wants for the amendment.”

“Good. I’ll let them know.”

“Is that all?”

“No,” Megan said and cleared her throat. “We have a new Jennifer issue to deal with.”

Hearing one of his female companions’ names, Stephen turned to Megan and raised his eyebrows. As his middle sister and de facto press secretary, it was her job to promote and protect him, and she had no problem intruding into her brother’s private life.

She ignored his reaction. “I’ve heard from a contact in L.A. that she’s up for a new role. There’s nudity involved and some sex.”

Before he could respond, Patty jumped in. “Listen, I’ll be the first to admit your relationship with her has given you some nice press for the campaign. But—”

“But the senator’s sometime girlfriend can’t show her breasts to the world?” He chuckled.

“Not during an election cycle,” answered Patty. “You’ve got to tell her to delay the movie until after the election next year. Then she can branch out from her Disney flicks. If she doesn’t agree, I suggest breaking up with her now.”

“Okay, done.” It wasn’t a difficult request. Jennifer Hamilton may have been America’s sweetheart, but outside of bed, he found talking to her painful. She was no great loss. “I’ll handle it soon.”

“Thanks, boss,” Greg said in relief. “It’s just that . . . you know . . . no one expects you to be like Langford, but you need to stick with women who are respectable.”

Stephen pursed his lips when Greg mentioned his Republican opponent, Colorado State Treasurer Dan Langford. He was a family man and an archconservative who often said, “Unlike the McEvoy family, I don’t have a skeleton in my closet.” “Or a cogent thought in your head,” Patty always muttered in response. While Stephen was young and brilliant, with a storied family name, Langford was older, dim, but with a hard-fought rise to wealth and power. The election would be a study in contrasts.

Stephen didn’t like thinking about it, and his mind wandered back to its bad mood. “Got it. Next subject.”

Greg checked his watch and announced, “Time for the interns. And, actually, I should tell you about one of them.”

Stephen’s phone rang, and after he checked the caller, he held up a finger to stop Greg. “Sorry. I need to take this call.”

“Okay, but . . .”

“If it’s about an intern, how big of a deal can it be?” With a shrug, Stephen answered his own question by taking the call and continuing to talk as he walked with them to the small conference room.

The month of September brought a fresh batch of interns for the school year, and Megan had cleared his calendar to do a meet and greet with the newbies. She hoped it would make up for the rest of the year when he ignored them.

Just as they entered the packed room, Stephen ended his call. He greeted the staff and interns with his trademark polished smile and personable demeanor. “Good morning, everyone. I hope you’re doing well. This is usually such a muggy time in D.C., but it’s a wonderful day outside. You should be playing hooky.”

The seated group dutifully smiled and said hello.

“I trust the staff have already made their introductions.” Stephen took his seat at the head of the table. “So I’d like to hear from our new interns. Let’s see. What do I want to learn about you?” He tapped the table for a moment. “Hmmm. Why don’t we start with your name? Then I’d like to hear your school, your major. Now, what else? How about your favorite place in Colorado and what town you’re from? Does everyone have that?”

All the interns furiously took notes, and one by one they answered his questions. Stephen nodded and smiled as each performed for him, though he was so bored he counted every tile on the ceiling. When he was on his 239th tile, he realized he was almost free of the tedious meeting. He raised his eyebrows in anticipation.

“And I believe we only have one more today.”

The table was so crammed with people that he couldn’t see who was about to speak. He spotted only a pair of feminine hands resting on a notebook as a clear, female voice answered him.

“Hi. My name is Anne Norwood. I’m a senior at Boulder, but I’m at Georgetown for the year working on my senior thesis. I’m an American history major and—”

“And what’s this thesis about?” Stephen asked, leaning forward. “I’ll warn you I was an American history major, too.” He tilted his head and saw some dark blond hair, but he still couldn’t get a good view of her.

The other interns followed his stare because he hadn’t asked any of them a direct question.

Her voice rose again from the back. “It’s an analysis of Thomas Jefferson’s romantic relationship with a slave, and whether it had any impact on his record on slavery.”

“I’m sorry,” he said with no expression on his face. “I can’t see you. Please stand up.”

When she rose, he nodded in acknowledgment. He immediately thought her pretty with a nice figure, though he didn't let on he was checking her out. Instead, he jumped to his question. "So did the relationship alter his position on slavery?"

"Not much," she said in a flat tone.

"And what do you think of this founding father?"

"Not much." She delivered the line plainly again, but her mouth twitched,

well aware she'd made a joke.

Everyone in the room laughed, including Stephen.

"Good. I think he's overrated, too."

More laughter ensued as the room enjoyed hearing a Democratic

politician buck two hundred years of adoration of the party's idol. While everyone chuckled, Stephen and Anne's eyes locked for a moment. They both smiled, and their eyes held the same mixture of surprise and respect for each other's response.

I like her, he thought, and wanting to hear her say more, he broke their stare.

"And what are your answers to my last questions?"

"I'm from Summit County, and I love the meadows of the Gore Range."

"Where?" He also loved those meadows—every one of them.

"Oh . . . I like the Eagle's Nest Wilderness."

Stephen wanted to blurt out, "Me, too," but he saw all the eyes in the

room drifting back and forth between him and Anne. He realized he must've paid her too much attention. It was high time to end the meeting and any more interactions with her.

With a final smile for the whole room, he said, "Thank you, everyone, for—" Something clicked, and he turned and pointed a finger at Anne. "Wait. You're from Summit County? And your last name is Norwood? Are you related to ___"

"Yes," she said in a firm tone. "Elton Norwood is my dad. He's the district attorney for the county."

“And your grandfather was once attorney general, correct?” he asked, keeping his voice even.

“He was.” She smiled. “Yes, my family are Republicans, but I’m not.”

Without skipping a beat, he returned her smile and lied, “We won’t hold that against you.”

As everyone broke into laughter, he closed the meeting graciously, while Patty, Greg, and Megan gave one another anxious looks. They followed him to his office, where he took his seat and waited for Greg to close the door.

With his office sealed, he grumbled, “So, she’s the intern you wanted to tell me about.”

“Yeah, I tried.” Greg took a seat and clasped his hands.

“Why is Elton Norwood’s daughter an intern in my office?” Stephen’s eyes roamed the room searching for an answer.

“If we hadn’t hired her, it would’ve looked bad for us,” Megan said matter-of-factly.

As he considered her assessment, Stephen leaned back against the chair and touched his shock of black hair in absentminded thought. It was true, the Norwoods were a respected Republican family in Colorado, and Elton was a popular district attorney in Summit County. At the very least, it would be impolite to reject his daughter for an internship.

He muttered, “Okay. You’re right.”

“You know,” Greg said as he leaned back in his chair and held up his hands in a plea. “The Norwoods are moderates, and Elton and my dad are in Rotary together back home, and they’re friends. Elton is—”

“A Republican nonetheless, and I’m sure he’s friends with Langford, too,” Stephen said with palpable distaste.

“He probably is friends with Langford, but he really is a stand-up guy. He knows I work for you, but he didn’t even say anything to my dad when Anne applied for an internship. When I told my dad about it, he asked Elton why he

didn't mention it to him. Elton said he didn't want it to appear like he was looking for favors for his daughter. I gotta tell you, that's just like him."

"He is known to be a fair person," Megan said.

"And Anne is just a smart, nice kid, who happens to be from a Republican family. It will be fine," Greg said with finality.

"Kid is not the term I would use for her." Patty chuckled. "She's definitely a woman."

Thinking back to how Anne looked and carried herself, Stephen agreed with Patty, but he didn't want to announce it.

Greg grimaced and shook his head at Patty. "Whatever. She graduated from high school with my youngest brother. She's a kid to me."

"Well, regardless," Patty said as she turned to Stephen. "I bet Elton Norwood is friends with Langford. I didn't want Anne in this office either, but we couldn't say no to her. She's most likely not a rat, though I'll still watch her. You shouldn't worry about it."

"I can feel her out," Greg offered. "Just to be sure."

Stephen's cell phone vibrated again, and as soon as he saw Helen appear on the screen, he motioned toward the door. "I'd appreciate that, Greg. If you don't mind, I need to take this call and talk to my sisters."

"No problem."

The chief of staff was only involved in part of the senator's life; the family controlled everything else. It was an unorthodox arrangement—having not just one, but two family members as part of a senator's most senior staff, but as a McEvoy, Stephen was no ordinary senator.

As Greg closed the door, Stephen answered the phone. "Hello, Helen."

Rolling her eyes, Patty put her feet up on the coffee table and began twirling her red, Irish curls. Megan scrolled through her phone's e-mail and tapped her foot. It was a loud warning for Stephen to hurry.

After less than a minute of conversation, he ended the call and turned to his sisters. “I bet this is the last time.”

“Good. I still can’t believe you screw around with a Republican, especially her of all people,” Patty said as she crossed her arms and smirked. “Well, I can believe it. It just disgusts me.”

“Helen Sanders really is the Wicked Witch of the West.” Megan cringed.

“Now come on. She’s much prettier than that.” Stephen chuckled. “Though I agree she has an evil side.”

“An evil side?” Patty sneered. “What side of her isn’t evil?”

“Amen,” said Megan. “I just heard she refused to do a fundraiser for Michaelson unless he cosponsored her stupid militia amendment and gave her top-billing on the invitation—even above the governor of his state.”

“And her staff hates her. She has the worst reputation as a boss of anyone in the Senate.” Patty snickered. “That’s quite an achievement considering how many pompous assholes there are around here. The sooner you stop seeing her, the better. I don’t trust her.”

“Are things ending because of Matt Smythe?” Megan asked. “I just checked the wires. An AP story says she campaigned with him this weekend. They’ve been together a lot lately.”

“I think they’re getting engaged,” Stephen replied. “Frankly, I’m relieved to be done with this. It’s been difficult to break off.”

“So it’s not easy having an affair with another senator?” Megan smirked. “Especially from the other party?”

“No, not easy. But it’s not an affair. We were just. . . dating.” “Bah!” Patty laughed. “Since when are dates only in a bed?”

§§§§

At nine o’clock sharp that night, Senator Helen Sanders pressed the intercom button outside the giant wrought iron gates of the McEvoy residence. In her home state of Idaho, such a house would be landmark, and she would want

her arrival to be in a limousine and televised. In Washington, D.C., the building merely blended in with the rest of the mansions and embassies on Massachusetts Avenue, and she preferred a discreet entrance.

Seconds later the gates opened for her, and after she parked her car out of sight from the street, the house door swung open. She strode inside, enjoying the ease of entry and knowing her favorite amusement awaited her.

As Stephen closed the door, he welcomed his expected guest. “Good evening. It’s nice to see you.”

“It’s good to see you, too, but I don’t have much time tonight.” She walked into the foyer, turned, and smiled when she saw his jeans. He wasn’t much younger, but in jeans he made her feel like Mrs. Robinson, and Helen liked every scrap of power she could get. She saddened once she realized this would be their last encounter—at least until she was safely married. With a few steps, she closed the space between them and touched his T-shirt. Her voice was sweet, but husky. “You’re smart enough to know why I’m here.”

“You’re leaving me for your own kind.” He chuckled.

“Something like that. Matt wants to settle down.”

“Is it what you want?” he asked with a raised eyebrow.

“Yes. Very much. Tick-tock, you know.” Helen controlled everything in

her life, and she wasn’t going to let her biological clock get away from her without a marriage. Matt Smythe was the remedy. He was the perfect husband—conservative, unobjectionable, and easily pliable.

“Then I’m happy for you,” he said, crossing his arms.

“I want something else right now, though,” she said as she unbuttoned her coat.

“What’s that?”

She tossed her jacket on a chair and walked into the adjacent dining

room. In the unlit room, she slipped out of her dress, revealing a black bustier, silk stockings, and lacy panties.

Stephen shook his head and laughed. “Helen, what would the good people of Idaho think about this?”

“The good people of Idaho will never find out about us.” She sat atop his mother’s antique table and spread her legs, giving him a better view. “Besides, it’s just one more time to remember you. And for you to remember me.”

“But what about Matt?” he asked with reproach.

“Oh, he’ll never know about you. No one will ever know about you because neither one of us will ever tell.” She beckoned him with a finger. “That’s why we’ve been perfect for one another.”

§§§§

A little after eight the next morning, Stephen sat in the back of his Lincoln Town Car reading The New York Times, while his driver, Jim, maneuvered through the streets around the Capitol building. When they stopped at one of D.C.’s interminably long stoplights, he glanced to his right. Standing on the sidewalk near his car was Anne Norwood. The dark windows allowed him to stare unnoticed, and the timing of the light gave him a full minute to study the young woman.

It was a steamy, early-September day, and she dressed like your average Capitol Hill staffer walking from the Metro to work. She wore a suit, but the jacket hung on her arm, and a sleeveless top kept her cool. Stephen again admired her figure; her arms were toned, and a belt accentuated her small waist. Her hair was up off her neck, with stray tendrils damp with sweat. The heat also made her tanned skin pink. She turned her head for a moment, as if she sensed she was being watched. He observed her profile and decided she wasn’t generically pretty as he’d thought. There was something both unique and familiar about her. With freckled cheeks and the body of an athlete, she looked like a girl who loved the outdoors, and it was a look he’d always found attractive. Her legs were bare beneath her skirt and, like many women walking to work, she wasn’t yet in heels. Instead, she wore a pair of lime green Converse low-tops, which made him smile. He thought she seemed like she’d be fun to be around—to maybe go on a hike with.

As the crosswalk sign signaled the light would soon change, she looked directly into the window of his sedan. Similar cars swarmed the streets of

D.C., each one a sign of someone important inside. Though she didn't know it, their eyes met. The light soon turned and his car rolled past her.

The image of her bright and curious eyes stayed with him, making Stephen wince in frustration. When he thought back to the little show Helen put on last night, he felt ashamed. He shook his head in disgust, but quickly shook it a faster in disbelief. What in the hell am I thinking?

There were always pretty young things as staff and interns in his office, and he treated them all the same way; he avoided them. Those women were off-limits; political self-preservation required it. If Patty ever caught him even glancing at a staff member for too long, she'd mutter, "God damn it, Stephen. Don't shit where you eat."

He grimaced. It would be one thing if he simply was admiring an intern for her looks. For Christ's sake! I want to go on a hike with her? He hated hiking with other people. Being in the outdoors alone was one of his greatest pleasures. The only person he had liked hiking with was his father. Why would he ever want to hike with her?

Looking out the window, he wondered what kind of girl she really was. Even if Elton Norwood was a moderate Republican, he was still a Republican. He'd endorse Dan Langford. Anne might stupidly mention something she heard in the office about Stephen's campaign to her father, who might tell it to Langford. Then he'd have direct knowledge of how Stephen planned to defeat him.

The girl was trouble in every way. He shook his head and turned back to his paper. The less he thought about her, the better.

CHAPTER 2

That morning, Anne sat in her cubicle and sorted through constituent mail. Out of nowhere, she heard a friendly voice.

“Anne Norwood, I can’t believe you didn’t introduce yourself to me.”

She looked up to see Greg Miller smiling as he leaned against the partition. She placed the envelopes aside and rose to shake his hand. “I’m sorry. I didn’t think you’d know who I was.”

“Of course I do.” He nodded down the hall. “C’mon. Let’s get a cup of coffee. You’re the only other person in the office from back home.”

“I’d love to. Thanks.” As Greg led her out of the office, she asked him how he ended up working on the Hill. While he detailed his career up the congressional ladder, she nodded and took note, but her mind wandered. She was baffled as to how she had gone from sorting envelopes to coffee with the chief of staff.

When they arrived at the elevators, he pressed the button and placed his arms across his broad chest. “So, why did you apply for an internship with Senator McEvoy? Why not another member of Congress?”

“Well, I like his politics,” she answered as she looked at his arms. The combination of his question and his stance told her his offer of coffee wasn’t a social one. She took a deep, calming breath before speaking again. “And I’d rather work in the Senate than the House. I’m also interested in environmental issues, and Senator McEvoy sits on the Energy and Natural Resources Committee.”

“Sounds good.” He ushered her into the elevator. “But what does your dad think of you working here?”

“When I told my dad I was applying for this internship, he shrugged it off. He thinks I’m young and naïve. You know, like why I else would I want to work for a Democrat?”

“But he didn’t stop you?”

“Oh, he and my mom gave me a few warnings, telling me I needed to think about what I was doing, but that’s it. They always say my brother and I are

allowed to make our own mistakes.” She smiled and shook her head. “How’s that for confidence in your kids?”

“That sounds like something your dad would say.” He chuckled as they exited the elevator into the Hart Building basement.

“I guess you know enough of his sayings from the papers.”

“Yeah. Elton has a way with words.”

Things were quiet between them as they walked into the cafeteria and got

their coffees. When they sat down, he quizzed her on the latest gossip in Summit County. It didn’t take long before he asked the question, giving away the real reason behind the impromptu coffee date.

“And what do you think about Dan Langford?” he asked, leaning back in his seat.

“Langford?” she asked, though she knew exactly where he was going. “I don’t know. He and my dad are friendly. I’ve met him a few times.”

“So tell me what you think about him.” He sipped his coffee. “Your father’s a Republican, Dan’s a family friend, but you’re working for Senator McEvoy. What’s the deal?”

“Well, obviously I don’t agree with him on anything,” she answered and raised a hand in self-evidence. “Langford’s way more to the right than my dad, and I think my dad’s already pretty conservative—at least for me. I’m the black sheep in my family.”

“If you didn’t say you disagreed with them, I’d kick you out of our office immediately.” He laughed.

“You know, I really appreciate that I got this job, despite my father.”

“Aw, hell. It’s Colorado. Everybody is related to a Republican somehow.”

§§§§

The next morning, one of the receptionists called in sick, so Anne covered the office phones for the day. It was easy enough work, and she liked talking to

constituents, even if they were angry. When the waiting area quieted around midmorning, the other receptionist went on a break. Anne took the opportunity to study for a class, and the few minutes of silence lulled her into complete focus on her reading. When the office door opened, she jumped and slammed the book shut.

At first, it only registered that a good-looking man had entered the room. Soon his face clicked, and she found her wits. “Good morning, Senator McEvoy.”

“Morning,” he muttered as he strode past and into the main office.

His brief glance felt more like a glare to her. She sighed and told herself not to take it personally. She was an inconsequential intern; it had nothing to do with her. She should get used to it. But she wondered if she had done something wrong. Looking around, she tried to see if there was a task she’d missed. If the phones were silent and the office empty, there was little to do. Would he rather have seen her surfing the web or playing solitaire than reading a book? She shook her head and went back to reading.

§§§§

Normally, Stephen wouldn’t think twice about the receptionists in his office. He’d give them a perfunctory “hello” in the morning and “good- bye” at the day’s end. Otherwise, he ignored them as he came and went throughout the workday.

With Anne at the front desk, it was different. Each time he walked by, he noticed her because she stood out compared to the usual receptionist in her place. The pimply guy, straight out of Georgetown, had been replaced by an attractive woman. Of course Stephen would eye her.

Stephen believed Greg’s report that Anne wasn’t engaging in political espionage in his office, yet he still wondered about her. From the snippets he caught of her conversations with constituents, she had perfect manners, even when taming callers angry over one of his votes. She also read a lot, both books and newspapers. Occasionally, he caught her tapping away on her phone. He assumed the texts were to a boyfriend.

While Stephen pondered Anne, she never acknowledged him again. After their terse exchange that morning, she decided it was best to keep her head down and concentrate on the task at hand when he was around.

Toward the end of the day, she was again alone in the reception area. The door swept open, and she raised her head only long enough to see it was him. Back to her reading, she sensed he'd walked past her, but there was more movement. She spotted dark pants in front of the desk. Folding the paper, she asked dutifully, "May I help you?"

"You know . . ." he said, pointing to the page. ". . . they say no one under the age of thirty reads print newspapers anymore."

"Well, I guess I'm an exception." She wore a proud smile. "I've always loved them."

"Why is that?"

"When I was growing up, Silverthorne was really tiny. Nothing like it is now."

"That's true. It's changed a lot. It's gotten to be pretty commercial." He grimaced in agreement.

"Exactly. So newspapers were like these windows to a whole other world beyond the mountains. I read The Denver Post every day. It was different reading the actual paper, rather than the words on a computer screen. Seeing things in print and feeling a paper in my hands made the rest of the world seem more real. Anyway, that's why I read the paper." She considered who she was talking to and shrugged. "It probably all sounds silly to you. You're from the city."

"No, it doesn't sound silly." He stood at ease and smiled. "I had somewhat the opposite experience."

"How so?"

"I was stuck here during the school year while my dad was in the Senate, but I spent my summers at our ranch outside Kremmling. I loved it there. I never wanted to leave."

“It’s pretty out there,” she said as she envisioned the next county over from hers.

“It is. And much more fun than St. Albans all-boys School here in D.C.” “I imagine,” she said with a light chuckle.

“I hated leaving the ranch. For years, I’d hide the day we were supposed to leave. It drove my parents nuts.”

“Where would you hide?” She grinned at what she thought was an adorable story, especially coming from him. Until that moment, she hadn’t thought him very human.

“I don’t know . . . closets, cabinets . . . sometimes the hay in my horse’s stall.”

“Aw,” she said, resting her chin on her hands. “I don’t miss home at all. I thought I would, but I don’t. I do miss my horse, though. It doesn’t make sense. I leave him every year for school and don’t think about him. Now, I move here, and now I’m texting my mom just to see how he’s doing.”

“What kind of horse is he?”

“A black Morgan named Orion, but I call him Orie.”

“Sounds like a handsome guy.”

“He is. Do you have a horse?”

“No. Not anymore.” He sighed. “My family has a working ranch, so we have some there, but none of them is mine. I don’t have the time.”

Anne sensed he didn’t like his predicament. The look in his blue eyes was also blue, and she felt badly for him. She offered some encouragement.

“But you’re lucky to see them when you can.”

A few seconds lapsed as he held her gaze. A touch of anxiety hit her

when she thought he might be debating what to say, but then he nodded and smiled. “You’re right. I am lucky. I should remember that.” As he turned to leave, he said, “Have a good night.”

“Thanks. You, too.”

She opened her newspaper again, though she didn't read. She imagined the handsome Senator McEvoy as a sad little boy hiding in the hay. It was a sweet image, and it seemed to hold true today. Why couldn't he remember his luck in life? He was a McEvoy and the son of the revered Patrick McEvoy. His father had recently died, which was tragic, but Stephen was appointed to complete his term in the Senate. No one would say he was unlucky. Her brow furrowed. I wonder what that's about.

§§§§

The following day, Stephen spied Anne through the window as he approached his office. Pretending to check his phone, he stopped in the hallway for a minute to watch her as she read. He liked the way she answered his newspaper question the day before. He envisioned a sheltered girl studying the paper every day for news of life outside her tiny Colorado town.

With a loose braid over her shoulder, he thought she looked pretty. She touched the plait as she read, and he wondered what she was concentrating on.

“Good morning, Anne,” he greeted as he walked inside.

Her eyes flew up from the page, and she closed the book. “Good morning, Senator. How are you?”

“Good, and you?”

“I'm fine, thanks.”

He glanced at the book's cover, John Rawls's A Theory of Justice.

“Doing some light reading?”

“Oh. Yeah.” She smiled. “It's for a class.”

Remembering the book from his own school days, he asked, “And what do you think of it?”

“Well, it's a little dry, but I think his thesis is right. Justice should also be about economic fairness.”

“You really think that?”

“I told you the other day, my dad is the Republican. Not me,” she said

with a wry grin.

“I know that’s what you said—”

“You’re just going to have to trust me.”

“I suppose I will.” He’d said it jokingly, but the meaning was serious. She

worked in his office; he had to trust her, and at that moment, he wanted to trust her because he wanted to talk to her more. She was funny and cute and made him smile. As they shared a grin, he felt off-balance, and he nodded at the door. “I’ve got a meeting. Have a good day.”

When the receptionist came back to work the next day, Stephen was disappointed to see the pimply guy at the front desk, but he told himself it was a good thing. Anne was too appealing to be around all the time.

§§§§

A few days later, Stephen and Megan walked down the office hall, rehashing their latest meeting. In the middle of the same hallway, Anne and another intern stood studying the giant map of Colorado covering the wall. Stephen wondered what they were pointing at, but he planned on walking right by them.

Megan was always polite, though, and stopped to greet them. “Hello, Anne. Hello, Keith. What are you doing?”

“Um . . . Sen . . . Senator McEvoy, Megan, hello,” Keith stuttered. “Anne was just . . . pointing out nice places to spend some time outdoors. She really knows her stuff.”

“Really, I don’t,” Anne retorted. “Good afternoon, Senator. Megan.”

“Well, Keith says you do,” Stephen said and smiled. He was eager to see her reaction to being put on the spot.

“Not as much as some.” Anne shrugged. “My dad likes to get away when he can, so I’m familiar with a few remote places.”

Keith chuckled and shook his head. “Yeah, she keeps pointing out these wilderness areas where they won’t let you mountain bike even though

nobody is around. I told her she should find me places closer to civilization where I can ride.”

“What?” she said in a joking reprimand. “Wilderness is no place for mountain bikes. It’s supposed to be serene and quiet, not full of gonzo bikers blasting over trails.”

Stephen smiled at Anne’s response, and he was jealous Keith could spend his morning talking to her about Colorado’s beautiful countryside. “You know, Keith, I love to mountain bike, too, but I have to agree with Anne.”

“Keith, where do you ride around Denver?” Megan asked and pointed to the map. “I love finding new places to ride near the city.”

As Keith showed Megan spots near his home, Anne smiled at Stephen. He didn’t speak for a moment, simply taking her in. He thought she was the definition of a mountain beauty. With her hair streaked from the sun, tan, freckled skin, and bright eyes, she was lovely. Wanting to hear more from her, he threw out the first question to pop into his mind. “So you don’t mountain bike?”

“No. My brother rides a bike, but I’d rather hike.”

“I would, too.”

“Well, really I’d rather ride a horse. He does the work. I’m a slow hiker.”

She chuckled. “Nobody likes going with me.”

He bit his tongue to keep from saying he’d very much like to go on a hike

with her. His eyes darted down to her small waist, thinking how easy it would be to pick her up and move her over a fallen tree or any other obstacle in their way. He came to his senses and grasped for another question to continue the conversation. “Does anyone else in your family ride?”

“My mom. She grew up on a ranch. We ride together, except when she’s got a baseball game.”

“Huh?” His brow furrowed in confusion.

“Yeah, it’s odd. My mom, mild-mannered Mary Beth Norwood, is obsessed with baseball. She’s like the Rockies’ biggest fan.”

“So do you like baseball?”

“It’s kind of boring to me, but on a nice day, it’s great to go to a ballpark and sit in the sun with a beer.”

As she spoke, Stephen lost himself. He was no longer Senator Stephen McEvoy, or Stephen McEvoy, District Attorney, or even Stephen McEvoy, son of Senator Patrick McEvoy. He was just a guy at Coors Field with Anne, watching a Rockies game and drinking a couple of beers.

Down the hall, Patty’s voice interrupted his daydream. “Megan. You’re late.”

“I believe we were waiting for you,” Megan replied in an annoyed voice.

Stephen snapped out of his daze as his sister gestured for him to walk forward. She smiled at Anne and Keith. “I have to get the senator to his campaign manager. You two have a good day.”

Stephen looked at his watch, remembering who and where he was. “Yes, we need to go. Good-bye . . . for now.” He walked away without looking back.

After they left the hall, Keith paced excitedly back and forth. “That was too fucking cool!” he exclaimed, turning to Anne. “Wow. He likes to mountain bike. That’s awesome. I’m going to tell Gabe.”

He left a bewildered Anne standing alone in the middle of the hallway. She decided to walk to the bathroom to think through the last few minutes. She replayed all the conversations she’d had with the senator. It increasingly felt like he wanted to get to know her, but how could that possibly be the case?

She remembered standing in line at Safeway recently and reading a gossip rag with a photo of Senator McEvoy and the actress Jennifer Hamilton at a charity event. When she thought of Jennifer Hamilton’s homecoming-queen looks and disproportionately large chest, she self-consciously touched her braid and glanced at her breasts. There was no way the senator could be interested in her. It just wasn’t possible.

Yet he always spoke with her, though he didn’t have to. She was only an intern. By the end of their latest exchange, he’d been inching toward her. She didn’t think she had imagined it. If any other guy acted the way he had, she’d assume he was flirting.

She shook her head. A romance with an intern was political suicide, and Senator McEvoy wasn't stupid. She searched for a reason for his actions. Maybe it was so she wouldn't bad-mouth him to her father?

She took a breath and tried to accept any rational explanation, but the girlie part of her brain wanted to stay confused. Because she found him interesting, she wanted to think he had an interest in her, and because she thought he was so handsome, she wanted to think he found her attractive, too. But she prided herself on being a smart girl. Her mind drifted back to the People magazine photo, and she knew she should accept the rational explanation.

§§§§

When Stephen and Megan finally entered his office, Patty slammed the door. "What the fuck was that?"

"What's your problem?" Megan asked as she sank into the sofa. "No big deal. We were just being nice."

"That may be your reason." Patty glared at Stephen. "But you were on the make."

"Hardly." He sat down at his desk and scowled to hide his guilt.

"I'll be the judge of that. I'm not a fool. I know you." She turned to her sister. "And Megan, you're supposed to be helping me protect this senate seat. Why didn't you stop him?"

"I didn't notice anything." Megan shrugged and turned to Stephen. "Do you actually like Anne?"

"Can we move on?" He shook his head and avoided answering the question directly. "Nothing happened."

Patty raised her eyebrows. "And nothing will happen."

"Nothing will happen," he said flatly.

"Good." Patty nodded. "I expect you to go back to treating her like you do every other intern around here. Ignore her."

Megan glanced at her brother the way they always did when they needed to talk without Patty around. He saw her request for a private conversation, and he rebuffed her with a twitch of his nose. This was personal.

With a yawn and scratch of his temple, he shut down the subject altogether. “Okay. Let’s move on.”