



Rose & Crown

UNCHARTED WATERS

Sara DuBose

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BY

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FIRST CHAPTER (SAMPLE)

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CHAPTER 1.

Glancing out the breakfast room window, I noticed an unfamiliar black car in front of my apartment. The male driver appeared to be staring directly at my door. My mind jumped to Donnie but I knew this was wishful thinking. Donnie drives a truck and hardly knows I'm alive.

I took a sip of orange juice, and decided the stranger must be trying to find someone. Our apartment numbers are difficult to read; maybe he's nearsighted like me. I stabbed at the remaining egg on my plate, but it no longer looked appealing. The driver continued to sit.

I stood, picked up the plate, and took a step toward the window. As I stooped for a closer look, the car eased forward and sped away. I made a mental note of the make (a Honda). Easy to do since I work at the Montgomery (USA) Honda dealership. I chastised myself for giving the incident any thought at all.

The cell rang, so I retrieved it from my bathrobe pocket.

"Morning, Beth. How's it going?" Shannon's vivacious voice caught me off-guard.

"Fine." I hoped I sounded normal. The man in the car made me more skittish than I realized.

"Still wanna go shopping and do lunch?"

"Sure." I tried to match her mood. "Let's meet at Eastchase in front of Dillard's around 10."

Shannon was my 3-P gal: popular, pretty and prosperous. Friends since junior high, Shannon's

personality pulled me out of my quiet and introspective nature.

I headed for the shower, and allowed myself to linger under the warm water a bit longer than usual. The cell rang once but I ignored it. On the fourth ring, my answering machine cut in, but the caller's words were garbled.

After drying off, I checked the phone and heard a strange voice say, "Hello there, gorgeous. I drove by earlier, hoping to catch a glimpse of you. Well, you're probably in the shower by now." A long pause followed. "Anyway, have a good day. You'll be hearing from me later."

Not recognizing the voice, I listened again. For a second, I thought about Lewis at the office, but this guy didn't sound like Lewis. In fact, I knew all of the employees now and couldn't think of anyone who would leave such a message.

Reaching for the hair dryer, I noticed my left hand was shaking and my mouth felt dry. When I looked at myself in the mirror over the sink, I didn't like the look in my eyes. My mother always said my eyes reminded her of rich chocolate fudge. Now they were more like weak coffee spilled in a saucer.

Twenty minutes later, dressed in jeans and my favorite blue T-shirt, I headed for the door. I rechecked the lock twice, and bolted the second lock. Maybe I was being paranoid. Shannon would think so.

After I got Shannon past the make-up counter in Dillard's, she helped me select some tops that might be appropriate for work. I tried a couple on and she said, "That brown sweater shows off all your curves."

"You think so? I don't want to attract the wrong sort of attention."

"Is there a wrong sort?" she giggled.

"You know the answer to that one. Look. A man in a Honda was staring at my apartment this morning, and then I got a weird phone call."

"Weird in what way?"

I told her but all I got was a “My advice is to put it out of your mind. Who knows? That guy could have had a wrong number.”

“Not likely.”

Shannon gave me one of her ‘let’s move on’ looks as she reached for her purse, so I decided to change the subject.

“Say, I like your nails. What’s that color called?”

“It’s IPC Moonlight Charm,” Shannon said.

I glanced down at my un-manicured fingernails and said, “Mine look more like Daylight Alarm.”

Shannon laughed, her blue-green eyes dancing as we headed for check-out.

We broke for soup and a sandwich at Panera Bread, and during most of our time, Shannon chatted about her upcoming date with Ryan. I tried to listen. However, since I was secretly mulling over the phone call, I finally asked if she had ever given my cell number to anyone.

“Are you crazy? Chill. You know I wouldn’t do such a thing without asking you.”

“Sorry,” I said. “I’m just trying to solve the puzzle.”

“Beth, there is no puzzle. One man is out looking at apartments. Another man happens to call the wrong number.”

“I suppose”

“Come on.” Shannon grabbed her check, signaling the end of our conversation.

As we headed back for my car, a black Honda suddenly appeared from around the corner and I jumped.

“What’s wrong, Beth?”

“That Honda looks like the one around my apartment this morning.”

“You are up-tight. Look, it’s a family in the car and they’re probably coming for lunch. You’ve got to get yourself together. Tell you what. I’ll call tonight—just to be sure you’re okay.”

As I dropped Shannon off at the parking lot, I

assured her I'd be fine but, when a half-pie moon appeared in the sky, I started listening for her call. And later, after I crawled into bed, a worm of worry crept under the covers with me.

END OF CHAPTER ONE

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