
Come Next Summer

by Leigh Michaels

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CHAPTER ONE

DEVON had planned to get up early that January morning. “Not, however, quite this early,” she firmly told her Siamese cat. Cyan merely stared at her with innocent blue eyes, sat down on the pillow next to Devon’s nose, wrapped her sable-brown tail elegantly round her cream-colored body, and patiently washed her paws. Her statement was made; it was breakfast time.

Devon groaned, turned over on the couch and concentrated on going back to sleep. It was useless, though; Cyan had made up her mind.

Devon was reaching for her robe when a voice from the doorway said cautiously, “Dev? Are you awake? I’ve got coffee for you.” The voice was followed by a small-boned, dark-haired girl in a quilted pink dressing-gown. She set a tray down on the coffee table and curled up in a chair across from Devon’s makeshift bed. “It’s snowing,” she announced baldly.

“That’s exactly what I didn’t want to hear.”

Julie shrugged. “It should make apartment hunting easier. No one else will be out.”

Devon reached for the coffee mug, already creamed and sugared to her taste. “Everyone else already has an apartment,” she pointed out. “With classes starting on Monday, everyone but me is already settled in. Why wasn’t I smart enough to come back early?”

Julie shrugged. “It wouldn’t have made any difference. There isn’t much turnover between autumn and spring semesters; you know that, Devon. Just people like you, who were gone in the autumn to do their practice teaching. A few here and there drop out, but almost everyone sits tight till spring.”

“Why do you always have to be so darn logical about everything, Julie?”

“It comes naturally,” Julie grinned. “How did you like the party last night?”

Devon sank back against the pillows, pulling the blankets up around her. “I met Mister Right at the punch bowl.”

Julie was undisturbed. “You’ve done that at least three times a year since I’ve known you, Devon.”

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“No, really! This time is it. I’m positive.” The cat yawned and then leapt up on her shoulders, curling around her neck like a fur collar and purring into her ear. “Darn it, Cyan, I’ll feed you when I’m ready,” Devon scolded. “He’s the ultimate Viking, Julie. Six- feet-one and curly blond hair and gorgeous big blue eyes...”

“And probably not a brain worth mentioning.”

“On the contrary! He’s a graduate student—working for a masters in political science.”

Julie shrugged. “Oh, well. Political science.”

“Just because you think biology is the only science there is...” But Devon was smiling. Julie had teased her about her boyfriends since the day they had moved into their first cramped dormitory room together.

Cyan licked her ear, and Devon jumped up. “All right, cat. Breakfast it is. And then off to hunt an apartment for us.”

Julie looked gloomy. “I wish I could invite you to stay here,” she said. “But. . .”

“Julie, I’m grateful to your parents as it is. Loaning me their study for a few days is more than generous, considering the cat and all my junk.” She waved a hand at the boxes piled against the opposite wall. “And I’d have to get my own place after the wedding, anyway. I can’t stay with your parents after you’re married.”

Julie sighed. “You could move in with David and me.”

“Exactly what the newlyweds need.” Her smile was fond. “Just because you’re marrying my brother doesn’t mean you have to take care of me, you know.”

“I worry about you.”

“I know, Julie. But I moved out of Aunt Eleanor’s house the minute I was old enough. I’ve been on my own for years now.”

“Speaking of your Aunt Eleanor—her guest list for the wedding is getting longer by the day.”

“Ignore her,” Devon recommended. “I don’t know how you’re going to stand living with her, Julie.”

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“It’s free, and that helps a lot.”

“David was always her favorite. I never could get away with the things he could.”

“David can do no wrong,” Julie agreed. “Sometimes she thinks I’m all right because David couldn’t possibly make a mistake and marry the wrong woman. But most of the time she just thinks I’m not good enough for him.”

“Well, I adore my big brother just as much as Aunt Eleanor does, but I know that you’re far too good for him.”

Julie giggled, spoiling the effect. “He just knows how much I’m costing him right now. The wedding coming up, and med school in the autumn...”

“He’s no dummy. If he supports you for the next five years, he can retire in comfort on a doctor’s income. His own private doctor. Amazing that Aunt Eleanor doesn’t see that.”

“Oh, she doesn’t approve of girls who think they want to be doctors. She’d rather I stay home and have babies—after the wedding, of course. I plan to spend most of my time on campus.”

“And the professors all think you’re such a star student. Someday I’ll tell them why you’re really devoting all that time to your lab work,” Devon threatened. “Besides, if I lived here I’d have to have a car. It must be five miles over to the campus, and I can’t hike that in this weather. Did you say it was snowing?”

“Not quite a blizzard, but close enough.” Julie’s voice was cheerful. “We could go build a snowman right now.”

“Hardly my idea of fun. Why didn’t I go to college in Arizona?”

“Because this one gives you free tuition. Remember?”

“How could I forget? At any rate, I have to find an apartment close to campus, and I will either have to pay a premium price or settle for a dump.”

“Probably both,” Julie said cheerfully.

Devon was rummaging through the pile of boxes, looking for Cyan’s cat food. “As long as it doesn’t have cockroaches.”

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“Darling, every apartment within two miles of campus has cockroaches. It’s a legal requirement.”

“Must you sound so darn pleased about it?”

“If you can’t find anything, we’ll work it out here. It would be fun to have you around all the time—we could stay up all night and gossip.”

“It might work till the wedding,” Devon said. “But after that you’d be tripping over me every time you turned around.”

“It would be fun, though—just like the old days in the dormitory. Do you remember the weekend nobody called and we demanded that the telephone company send a repairman out so we could be sure the darn phone worked?”

“And when he told us it wasn’t out of order, we were so depressed we left fake messages to cheer ourselves up?” Devon searched for her favorite jeans, washed so many times that they were soft and faded.

“That was before the fraternity houses found you, and I became your social secretary.” Julie looked a little disappointed.

Devon flipped her golden-blond hair back over her shoulder and started to brush it, long strokes that left it gleaming and silky as it streamed halfway down her back. “If I’m the one who got popular,” she pointed out gently, “why is it that you’re going to be the bride, and I’m the maid of honor?” She pointed across the tiny room to the long white gown on the dressmaker’s dummy, bristling with pins.

“That’s easy. You have a basic distrust of men.”

Devon’s brush stopped in the middle of a stroke. “That’s ridiculous, Julie. I’ve dated a hundred guys.”

Julie nodded. “And just as soon as one of them starts to get serious, you tell him very sweetly that you’d like to be his friend. It comes from your fear of rejection, actually. Your father deserted you when you were a child, therefore you think no man can be trusted.”

Devon slowly started brushing her hair again. “And when did you decide to become a shrink?” she asked sweetly.

Julie shrugged. “That insight didn’t take a shrink, hon. That’s beginning

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psychology. You heard the same lectures I did, but you weren't listening."

"Well, diagnosing my hang-ups isn't getting me an apartment." She put the brush down.

"Aunt Eleanor has one more bedroom."

"Living with her is out of the question."

"But she's your aunt," Julie objected.

"She was so delighted when I moved out that she would see me living in a garbage can before she'd extend her hospitality for more than a couple of days. She doesn't approve of my cat. To say nothing of all the men in my life—she's scared that I'm some kind of loose woman." The last sentence was muffled as Devon pulled a turtleneck sweater over her head. "And I'm not about to give up my social life to please her."

"Well, at least she does approve of your career choice. English teachers are a lot higher in her estimation than girls who want to be doctors." Julie imitated Aunt Eleanor's tone. "She thinks I'm only going to med school for fun."

"As if it was that easy to get in," Devon mused.

"If we could afford it, we'd move in a minute. But we're stuck with Aunt Eleanor till I graduate. Right now it looks like forever."

"Maybe someone will die and leave you and David a million dollars." Devon draped a chunky fake-gold necklace over the turtleneck and reached for the matching earrings.

"No one I know has a million dollars," Julie mused. "It never fails to amaze me; you can get dressed in five minutes and you always look like the front cover of *Vogue*. I'm going over to the lab in a couple of hours."

"It's Christmas break!"

Julie shrugged. "Somebody has to feed the rats. Do you want a ride?"

Devon shook her head. "I'll catch a bus. I got some addresses from the student housing office yesterday, and I want to check them out first thing. And since it's Friday, I have to locate something today so I can move this weekend."

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“Do you want to go to a movie tonight? Maybe David will take us.”

“Oh—I can’t, Julie.”

“The Viking?” Julie deduced shrewdly.

“His name is Matt and he’s taking me to the city symphony over at the performing arts hall.”

“I know. Even Vikings have occasional flashes of good taste. Just be careful, Dev. You don’t know much about him.”

“How much trouble can I get into at a concert? I can look out for myself.”

Julie looked dubious. “Good luck on the apartment hunting.”

JULIE HAD good reason to sound doubtful about her chances, Devon decided when by late afternoon she had exhausted her list. It seemed that there was not a single apartment for rent within walking distance of the campus. Devon scratched off the last address, sighed, and dropped the list into a garbage can.

It was starting to get dark, with the street lights flickering to life and reflecting off the swirling snowflakes. The day was gone, and she was out of luck. She shrugged snow off the shoulders of her long wool coat and went into The Portable Pie Company to take a break.

Portable Pies specialized in pizzas-to-go, but as the primary gathering spot for the university crowd, it carried a menu as diverse as the student body. Devon sat down at a small table by the front window and when the smiling waitress came by, she ordered a mug of hot apple cider.

The snow was piling up, drifting from a heavy gray sky in huge clumps of flakes. Another hour of this, Devon thought, and traffic would grind to a halt. Already there was no evidence of old, dirty snow left under the fresh blanket of white.

She stirred her hot cider with a cinnamon stick. A perfect day to be inside, she thought, watching the snow from a warm kitchen heavy with the smell of baking bread. *Not* a perfect day to be without a kitchen or even a loaf of bread to call her own.

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Just what would she do if she couldn't find a place to live? Imposing on Julie's parents any longer was unthinkable. Besides, Devon thought, she wanted a place of her own.

She stared into her cup and wondered if there was a dormitory room still available. She hadn't lived in a dorm since her freshman year; that was where she had met Julie. The dorms were expensive, and the food was awful. But it might be her only choice.

"You look very thoughtful."

Devon glanced up over the rim of her mug at a tall, dark-haired man, pipe in one hand, a wrapped taco in the other, who stood beside her table.

"May I sit down?" he asked, and did. "It's crowded today."

Devon looked around. It was, indeed, crowded—unusually so for late afternoon. Students were sheltering from the snow and catching up on the news from Christmas break. She shrugged and made no comment. Anyone with manners would eat his taco in silence, she thought.

He didn't. "Are you a student here?"

She stirred her cider and didn't look at him. "Yes."

The syllable was clipped and unfriendly. Too many men had tried to pick Devon up for her to fall for that sort of approach.

He fell silent, and she congratulated herself.

Then he said, "Fascinating snowstorm."

Devon pulled her attention away from the window. She'd been idly looking at the big white house across the street. "Fascinating? How could a snowstorm be fascinating?"

"It must be. You're paying a great deal of attention to it."

She looked him over carefully, employing a technique learned years ago. Devon's long cool stare was guaranteed to reduce the brashest of fraternity men to quivering jelly in a matter of thirty seconds.

It did nothing to this man. She stared at him long enough to decide that his face

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was ruggedly interesting rather than handsome, that his nose looked as if it had been broken at least once, that he had the broad shoulders of a football player, and that his dark brown hair was carefully cut and inclined to curl. He was older than the usual campus man—probably a graduate student, she decided.

He merely ate the taco without a trace of self-consciousness, crumpled the paper, and picked up his pipe. When Devon, still without a word, turned her attention back to the window, he said, “May I conclude that you liked what you saw?”

She started to ask him if he was as conceited as he sounded, but her attention was drawn back to the house across the street. The big, lighted window that she had been looking at longingly now displayed a sign that said, *Apartment for Rent*.

Devon ran for the door. The sign hadn’t been there two minutes ago; that sort of luck came only once in a lifetime, and she was not going to hang about wondering what she should do.

She dodged cars across four lanes of traffic, ignoring a shout from the doorway of Portable Pies, and pulled up on the front porch of the big old house, out of breath. She pressed the doorbell and then leaned against the jamb. This had to be it; she had to be lucky this time.

And what luck! The house had been one of the original mansions that lined the streets when the town was new; most of them had been torn down to make room for the campus. Even if the house had deteriorated, it would not be one of the small, boxy apartments that surrounded the university.

A voice came out of the dusk beside her. “You’d better start being a little more careful.”

She looked up, startled. The dark-haired man was climbing the steps to the front porch.

He came to stand beside her and pulled his pipe out of his pocket. “In the dark, and with it snowing like this, drivers have more to do than watch out for careless pedestrians. By the way, I seem to owe you an apology.”

“You certainly do,” Devon snapped, all patience gone. “And if you don’t stop following me you’ll be in for a lot more than an apology.”

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He lifted an eyebrow and struck a match, trying to light the pipe. A gust of wind quenched the flame, and he sighed and dropped the matchbook back into his pocket. "It isn't often that I have that effect on a woman, you see," he added apologetically. "Making her run out of a restaurant without paying for her apple cider."

Devon's mouth dropped open, and she took a step towards the street. "I didn't pay for it, did I?"

"No, you didn't."

She looked uncertainly from the house to the pizza parlor. If she went back to pay the bill, she might lose the apartment. But if she didn't...

"I took it as a compliment, actually."

"You insufferably conceited..." Words failed Devon.

His dark eyes were sparkling. "You really should be nice to me. I bought your cider."

"Thank you." It was grudging, and Devon fumbled in her pocket. "I'll pay you back, of course."

He waved it away. "Apartment for rent, hmm?" he said, reading the sign. "Running into you might have been a stroke of luck after all. I've been looking for one."

"Well, keep looking. This one is mine," Devon announced.

"Not yet it isn't," the dark-haired man said pleasantly.

The door opened a crack and before Devon could say a word, the man announced, "We've come about the apartment."

The elderly man at the door smiled. "That was quick," he said. "The ad's just come out in tonight's paper. Would you come in, Mister..."

"Hardesty. Jon Hardesty."

The landlord looked expectantly at Devon. "Mrs. Hardesty?"

"Devon Quinn," she said, thinking that if the apartment was advertised in the newspaper, there would be dozens of people wanting it. She'd have to move

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quickly.

“Dreadful weather, isn’t it?” the landlord said. “Just come this way. There’s a separate entrance, of course, but I hate to go out in the cold, so I’ll take you through. It’s a very nice apartment, two bedrooms and bath upstairs and living room and kitchen downstairs.”

“That’s an unusual arrangement,” Jon Hardesty said. He was studying the long hallway, with its high ceiling and elaborately carved woodwork.

“Yes, I don’t know why they split the house vertically like that, but it makes a pretty apartment. The previous owners did the remodeling. I believe her mother moved in with them.”

“That explains everything,” Jon smiled. Devon could have hit him; he and the landlord seemed to be on the same wavelength.

It was a pretty apartment. The bedrooms were large and airy; the bathroom was old-fashioned but recently redecorated, and the kitchen seemed to have been designed for her. It wasn’t all furnished, but there was enough furniture to get by with.

But it was awfully large, and the rent would probably be high. Then she scolded herself. No matter what it cost, she would grab it. She wasn’t in a position to be choosy, Devon thought as she poked about the kitchen cabinets.

Then, abruptly, she realized that she couldn’t hear the landlord and the man who had called himself Jon Hardesty. She slammed the cabinet door and rushed into the living room. If he managed to rent the apartment out from under her, she’d have no one but herself to blame.

“I’ll leave you to look it over,” the landlord was saying. “I’ll be across the hall. I think I hear my telephone ringing.”

As soon as the door closed behind him, Devon said, “I’m going to rent this apartment, Mister . . . whatever your name is.”

“Hardesty. And you’re welcome to try, Miss Quinn, because I also plan to rent it.”

She tried to reason with him. “I’ve been looking all day, and I must have an apartment before Monday, when classes start.”

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“Well, I’ve been looking all week, and I also must have a place to live before Monday. You said you’re a student?”

“Yes. What possible difference could that make?”

“Then you must have all kinds of friends around campus. I, on the other hand, am brand-new in town and know no one. You probably have dozens of places to stay, but I have nothing.”

“Where have you been staying?” Devon asked irritably. “If you’ve been here all week...”

“In a hotel. I’ll only be here one semester, but the cost of a hotel room does add up over the course of a few months. That’s why I should have the apartment.”

“Whatever happened to gentlemen?”

“That went out when equal rights came in.” He searched his pockets, found his pipe, put it between his teeth.

“I suppose you think that thing makes you look violently attractive,” she snapped.

He looked up over the bowl of the pipe with a smile. “No. Just serious and thoughtful. He’s asking eight hundred a month, by the way.”

“Eight hun...” Devon swallowed hard. It would be murderous to her budget; she had hoped to get by this semester without holding down a job. “That’s higher than I wanted to go, but I’ll manage.” She stared at him fiercely.

“It is a bit steep,” he agreed. “Of course, for this much space . . . Why do you need all the space, by the way? Got a boyfriend moving in with you?”

“Of course not.”

“I stand corrected. If you did, you wouldn’t need two bedrooms.”

The landlord tapped on the half-open door. “I don’t mean to sound pushy,” he said, “but there’s a woman on the phone who wants to look at the place. I don’t want her to come clear across town in this weather if it’s going to be rented when she gets here. What shall I tell her?”

“We’ll take it,” Jon Hardesty said. He didn’t even turn around. The landlord

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smiled and backed out of the room.

Devon gasped. “What do you mean, *we’ll* take it?”

“Look—what was that unusual name of yours? Devlin?”

“Devon,” she snapped.

“We can stand here till midnight and argue about who’s going to get this apartment, and in the meantime he’ll rent it to someone else. At least we have now assured that we have an apartment to argue about.” He sat down and lit his pipe. When it was finally drawing to his satisfaction, he looked up. “You may as well sit down,” he suggested mildly.

She ignored the suggestion. “What do you propose we do about this—impasse?”

“I see nothing to propose. I have every intention of moving in here tomorrow.”

Devon put her hands on her hips. “Well, so do I.”

He smoked quietly for a few minutes. “And nothing will change your mind?”

“Nothing.”

“Then I think we should go sign the lease.”

“Just what does that mean?”

“A lease? It’s a guarantee that...”

“I know what a lease is,” Devon said between gritted teeth.

He shrugged. “Then there’s just one question left. Do you want the front bedroom or the back?”

“You mean—both of us live here?”

“Why on earth not? There’s plenty of room, and we could both benefit from splitting the rent.”

“Aunt Eleanor will never believe this.”

“You think that’s going to be difficult. I have to explain it to my wife and three kids.”

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“What?” Devon nearly shouted the word.

He nodded sadly. “You know how it is. Can’t move kids in the middle of a school year, and when I found myself suddenly without a job, I had to come where there was one.”

“You must be crazy to suggest something like this!”

He frowned. “You’re probably right. Can you supply me with character references? So I can show them to my wife, you understand.”

I’VE LOST my marbles. That was the only explanation, Devon told herself as she sat through the first half of a concert that ordinarily would have absorbed her.

I signed my name to a six-month lease on an apartment, and I’m sharing it with a man I never met before today.

It sounded even worse when she stated it baldly like that. He could be anything from an escaped rapist to an undiscovered axe murderer, and she was moving in with him in the morning.

She dragged her attention back to the orchestra hall. The snow had tied up the city; attendance was sparse and the crowd was scattered over the auditorium.

“They’re good, aren’t they?” Matt whispered, bending his head towards her.

Devon nodded and tried to pay more attention. The program included Rachmaninov tonight, and the stormy music should fit her mood perfectly, but she found her attention wandering again just moments later. Unable to concentrate on the music, she started to study the crowd.

A bit later, Matt said, “Look up in the box seats to your left, Devon.”

Obediently, she did. “Which one, Matt? I don’t see...”

“In the third box from the front. The silver-haired man is Bob Dickinson. He’s been in the United States Senate so long that there isn’t even a contest any more when he comes up for a vote. I’d sure like to work for him.” There was a tone of reverence in his voice.

But Devon wasn’t listening. She was staring at the other male occupant of the

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box.

“That’s Jon Hardesty with him,” Matt went on. “I can’t wait to meet him, either.”

The matron sitting in front of them turned to fix Matt with a devastating glare, and he subsided.

So Jon Hardesty was moderately famous, Devon thought. And it seemed that neither rape nor axe murder was his specialty, if he was hobnobbing with a Senator. She glanced up at the box again. He certainly looked important tonight; a well-cut tuxedo did nothing to hide those broad shoulders, and though Devon knew he wasn’t truly handsome, he was certainly attractive.

The woman at his side added to the impression, as well; she was the most beautiful woman Devon had ever seen. Her black hair was coiled high on her head and her red dress sparkled under the lights. That, Devon thought, must be his wife— and no wonder she insisted on character references.

When intermission came, Matt almost leaped out of his seat. “I want to scrape an acquaintance with those two,” he announced. “Are you coming?”

Devon didn’t want to come face to face with Jon Hardesty in the lobby, but she also didn’t want to explain her reluctance to Matt. So she shrugged and stood up. Besides, she might be able to get some information from him. “Why is that name familiar? Hardesty, I mean.”

Matt was obviously delighted to have an audience he could instruct. “Hardesty was a one-term U.S. Representative,” he said. “He’s from the southern part of the state, though; not your district at all. You do read the newspapers now and then?”

“Just because I’m studying English literature doesn’t mean I read only Chaucer, Matt.”

He grinned. “It’s hard to believe you could live in this state and not know the name. He was defeated in the last election, because the presidential landslide hurt his party badly. He just left office the first of January. He’ll be back, though.”

“So what is he doing here at the university?”

“He’s one of the few Congressmen who is not an attorney—he started out as a professor of political science. So while he’s waiting for his star to rise again, he’s

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going to teach here. I've signed up for some of his graduate seminars."

"You sound certain that he'll be back into politics."

Matt grinned. "You have heard of the Kennedy family?" he teased.

"I seem to vaguely recall them," Devon said tartly. "Is he related?"

"Only in spirit. Jon Hardesty's father is just about as determined as Joe Kennedy was to put a son in the White House."

"Mrs. Hardesty would make a lovely First Lady."

"What? Oh, you mean the woman he's with."

"That was the one I was thinking of," Devon murmured.

"She's not his wife." Matt stepped into a gap in the crowd around the two objects of his attention, pulling Devon along with him.

Devon didn't resist. So the lovely lady wasn't his wife? She wondered what his wife was like, and whether she minded being left behind. She had to be young, certainly. He wasn't much more than thirty himself. And to have three school-age children... They must have been high school sweethearts.

She and Matt were now just a couple of rows back, in the crowd, near enough for Devon to hear clearly a the dark-haired woman said peevishly, "Let's go back and sit down, Jon."

"In a minute, Margo." He was still shaking hands and Matt inched his way through the crowd.

"Dr. Hardesty!" he said. "I'm Matt Lyon, and I'll be in your graduate seminars this semester. What do you think about..."

Devon lost track of the question about halfway through, but Jon Hardesty was patience itself. It was as though there was no one else around, she thought, surprised at the degree of attention he was giving Matt. But of course that was a politician's chief asset, being able to make each person feel valuable.

"Jon!" The dark-haired woman tugged at his arm.

Devon thought he looked a little disappointed as he turned to her. "Margo..." Then he saw Devon, and his eyes started to sparkle dangerously.

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“Dr. Hardesty,” she said coolly, offering her hand.

To her utter astonishment, he raised it to his lips with a flourish. “Miss Quinn,” he murmured as he kissed the back of her hand. He turned it over and started to press his lips to the sensitive palm.

She snatched it out of his grip.

“Jon!” the dark-haired woman said again. This time she sounded angry.

“I’m coming, Margo. Excuse me, Matt. Miss Quinn, I’ll see you tomorrow.” They moved off through the crowd.

“Well!” Matt stared down at Devon. “Aren’t you a dark horse? I thought you didn’t know anything about Jon Hardesty.”

“I don’t, Matt. I just happened to meet him today, that’s all.”

Matt didn’t pursue it. “Little Margo is a lousy campaigner, isn’t she?” he commented as they returned to their seats. “A woman who can’t shake a hundred hands in a theater lobby won’t be much use to him on the campaign trail.”

“I’m sure she has other attractions for Dr. Hardesty.”

Matt looked at her curiously. “Not the least of which is that she’s Bob Dickinson’s daughter. Funny that she isn’t a hand-shaker.”

“Perhaps she feels there’s no point to it, now that he is out of office.”

“How innocent can you be?” Matt asked. “Once a politician, always a politician.”

The conductor came on stage, and Matt let the subject drop as the second half of the concert began.

But Devon thought about it the rest of the evening. And every time she looked up at the box seats, she saw Jon Hardesty’s profile.

And she nibbled on a manicured fingernail and wondered what would happen to her when she moved into that apartment.