

Chapter 10

Theo POV

I could tell that Bethany was in deep thought; her eyes were distant, and she was quiet and shaking a little, all the signs I have seen often when one of my sisters is upset and is trying to get over it, trying hard to clear the mind, of some event that keeps going over in her head. All I can do is be there for her. I hardly know the woman, yet I want to get to know her, hold her, and tell her that the problems will eventually go away. I will have to tread carefully, or she clams up, and I might lose the chance to get to know the real woman before we even have a real date with her.

We arrive at the little studio my sister Cindy owns and runs. She is the family's artist and has managed to keep her head above water in this eld. How? I have no idea, but she has a relatively large online following, and her exhibitions always seem crowded.

A waiter greets us with a tray full of champagne, and another waitress arrives with a tray of canapés. It is all high-end caliber treatment. If you buy a piece of art, you could expect to pay a minimum of twenty thousand dollars. It can go up relatively high in price, depending on the artist and what they have done.

My sister greeted people and explained some of the work on display. I guided Bethany to the main attraction and worked our way from there. The piece is stunning. It was called 'A Day at the Races.' It was a horse with a jockey on its back, in full color, passing the winning post, with the nose of other horses at its rear. It was done in oils and some other materials, making the horse and jockey bold on the canvas. It almost had a three-D effect. The eye on the horse seemed to move with you as if it was staring at you. It was a ne painting, and one I have looked at a few times now, and each time it has grown on me, but I am not a punter, so I had not purchased it, and to be honest, I have nowhere in my home that would accommodate such a lovely piece of art. It should be in pride of place, not on a wall in my hallway or in a lousy bedroom.

Bethany stood staring at it for some time before she moved on to the next painting, not once commenting, and that left me wondering what she thought of it; she moved from one picture to the next before we arrived at a room full of carvings and sculptures. There was one that she stopped at, moved around it, returned to the front, read the name on the placard, and looked at it again. She scrutinized it from all angles, her face void of any emotion. I tried to see what she was looking at but failed. It was a plain sculpture; to me, it had no real quality. My niece could do better. I thought. But then again, who am I to judge when I see a painting get sold, and it looks just like my drop sheet after I have painted a friend's house? I am denitely not one to ask about art.

'Darling, so good of you to come.' my sister Cindy had found me. She came and hugged me, and air-kissed my cheeks, all for a show. Of course, at home, she would never greet me like that. I chuckled at her and kissed her cheek, not at all worried about getting my lips covered in her powered face.

'How could I not come and see what you have on show this time? I might even nd something I like.' I started, and before I could introduce her to Bethany, we were interrupted by her assistant.

'Excuse me, let us try to catch up before you leave. I need to go negotiate a sale.' And she gracefully oated away to some man and woman who wanted to buy the main attraction, which was not too bad but not something I wanted on my walls.

I turned to say something to Bethany, but she had already wandered off to another sculpture and was smiling at this one. It was good to see her smiling. That must mean that coming here was working and taking her mind off what had hurt her this morning.

When I reached to stand beside her, I placed my hand on her lower back, making her jump. It was not precisely the response I was going for, but at least it was something. I leaned forward and whispered in her ear.

'Would you like another drink?' I had seen the waiter moving around with a fresh tray, and the waitress had different food on her tray.

'No, when we are done here, I would like some lunch, take away and sit in the park.

'That sounds good. Do you have any preference for the food?'

'No, surprise me.'

We moved around a little bit more, nding another room with pottery and then a room with more pictures, this time watercolors. It dawned on me that my sister had made each room hold similar things, like oil paintings together, and a separate room for watercolor, though some charcoal pictures were with watercolor. I wondered why she had an abundance of oil paintings this time. I don't normally notice this type of thing, so maybe she had always done it that way, but Bethany seemed to like the watercolor more than the oils, which made me notice the different rooms more. Bethany had me noticing a lot of things I had taken for granted, and I was not sure how I felt about that.

Cindy found us in the watercolor room, as I was calling it, and gave me some more air kisses.

'So, Theo, what are your plans later? I want to catch up and have dinner tonight.' She did not even notice that Bethany was nearby, looking at a picture.

'I have plans, maybe another day.' I replied and hugged her before she moved away again to deal with another customer.

Bethany looked at me with questioning eyes but never asked. I had hoped she would, and then I could take her over to meet my sister. She moved to the last picture and murmured something about it. The picture was charcoal, and it seemed to be a negative of a photo. It was very cleverly done, though it was daytime, and with it being black and white, it gave the illusion of nighttime.

'Ready to leave?' I asked when my stomach told me it was lunchtime and it wanted food. I was going to get some Chinese takeaway. I had already ordered it while she was looking at the picture; all I needed to do was go there and pick it up. I am a frequent visitor to that shop. I do enjoy their satay chicken.

'Sure, did you want to say goodbye to the host?' Bethany looked over to where Cindy was talking to some customers, and I did not wish to interrupt her or spoil the possible sale.

'I will catch up with her later. Come on, I am hungry. Those few bites they gave out did little to soothe my hunger.' Bethany giggled at my attempt to joke, and it was beautiful to hear her giggle at last.

My hand fell on her lower back as I guided her out the door. As we walked out, my driver arrived, and I opened the door for her to climb in.

'The Chinese shop.' I said to my driver as I climbed in behind Bethany and put my seat belt on. The driver did not need to ask which one, I have sent him out to collect it for me a few times now.