

CHAPTER ONE

Monday, April 10, 2006

The wind blew in from the lake, adding an extra chill to the cold Chicago air. Pedestrians strode briskly, bracing themselves against the elements, while horns honked and brakes squealed in heavy downtown traffic that crawled along. A dismal gray sky was a harbinger of a spring snowstorm, and as Deanna Lewis paced near the entrance of her hotel on Michigan Avenue, she hoped the impending bad weather wouldn't delay her travel plans. Her auburn hair swirling around her face, she glanced at her watch, restlessly awaiting the arrival of the shuttle bus that would take her to the airport. Her flight's scheduled departure time was still more than three hours away, but Deanna couldn't wait to get home.

Thinking of Fort Lauderdale as home made her smile, especially here, just a few miles from Morton Grove, the only place she had ever lived until she left nearly ten years ago to attend college. A strong desire to be on her own, with the added inducement of spending winters in sunshine and warmth, had lured her to the University of Miami, and she'd been living in South Florida ever since. Shortly after receiving her marketing degree, she happily accepted the offer of a fulltime position with the event planning company she had worked for part time since a junior-year internship. Proud of her accomplishments, relishing the tropical climate, Deanna reveled in the solid start to a good and fulfilling life, always appreciating the unwavering support she received from her parents, Abby, an interior designer, and Craig, a sociology professor at Northwestern University

Because both were understandably strong proponents for education, believing a proper education stretched way beyond the classroom, their only child had been plied with knowledge on a wide variety of subjects and exposed to some wonderful experiences. Annual family vacations were not to plush resorts, but car trips to explore new places and meet new people. Weekends at home were often adventures in learning, whether at a museum, a concert, a Cubs game, or even something as simple as working in their garden or preparing a special meal. The love and respect Deanna felt for her parents grew even stronger as she got older, with the realization of how hard they worked to never let her feel neglected or lonely, or lacking in love, despite their busy careers. Sometimes, she would wish she had a larger family like many of her friends enjoyed, with siblings and aunts and uncles and cousins, but she believed the family she did have, and the close, loving relationship they shared, were precious gifts and she would always be grateful for them.

During her early years in Florida, her parents visited often, while her own frequent trips

back to Chicago dotted her calendar, and she thought that would always be the pattern of her life. But then tragedy struck.

Just over four years ago, Deanna's parents were killed in a car accident near their home. Learning both had died instantly, without any suffering, offered some solace to their daughter, but even now, tears filled her green eyes as she recalled the awful moment she first heard those words. She didn't believe she'd ever recover from the shock, or the months of nightmares that followed, but after making sweeping changes in her path, she eventually moved beyond the debilitating grief.

Shortly after losing her parents, she left her position as an event planner. She couldn't concentrate, and found that trying to plan celebrations of life for strangers only exacerbated the grief and pain that gnawed at her. When she confided those feelings to an insurance agent she knew in Miami, he offered her an opportunity to enter his company's training program and work for his office as a claims examiner. Without a clue as to what else she wanted to do, she accepted and had done well for herself in her new position. Although she didn't have the same passion she once had for her former career, the daily routine and abundant paperwork helped camouflage the anguish in her heart, and slowly, that despair began to dissipate. She'd always miss her parents, and didn't expect a day to go by when she wouldn't think of them, but she fought her way back from the deepest throes of grief. One day, she realized she could even smile and laugh again, and she was determined to make the best of the life she had.

But something was missing. A restless dissatisfaction undermined the illusion that she was living a fulfilling life. Feeling like she was chained to a desk all day, every day, was not something she ever aspired to, and she missed the thrill of taking an idea from paper to reality. She was craving the creative challenges she once thrived on, yet she got a queasy feeling whenever she thought of making any changes.

Then Mother Nature reared her ugly head and altered the course of Deanna's life once again. After two shockingly destructive hurricane seasons in South Florida, the insurance business became one of the most stressful industries in the area. Every insurance company, every office, was overwhelmed with claims, and like everyone else, Deanna was working nonstop, with no time to think. By the time Hurricane Wilma devastated the area in late October, she knew she had to get out, without waiting for the claims from the storm to be resolved. After much consideration and soul searching, she informed her boss of her decision right after they had worked through Thanksgiving. He persuaded her to work until the end of the year, but Deanna wouldn't stay beyond that. She was already formulating a plan for the future. It was time to follow her dream. And act on it.

Immediately after New Year's Day, she took the first steps toward her own event planning business, a career path that had seemed predestined for as long as she could remember. As a child, she loved to create elaborate tea parties for her dolls and stuffed animals, with matching cups and special themes, and even fresh flower centerpieces when the garden was in bloom. Shortly before she turned eight, she made a thorough and detailed list for her parents, explaining how she envisioned her upcoming birthday party. Describing the overall scene she saw, down to the placement and colors of the decorations, and even including a schedule of activities, she reveled in the reactions she received.

"That's my girl," her mother had gushed, enveloping the child in a loving embrace. "You created a warm, appealing atmosphere with style and grace, and a great sense of color. Very good work."

"It's easy to see you put a lot of thought into all of those ideas," her father added with an

approving smile. “You should be very proud of yourself. You might even want to think about a career in party planning after you graduate from college. You certainly have a knack for it.”

Deanna stared in disbelief. “You mean I could get paid to plan parties? Wow!”

Floored by the idea, she considered the possibilities and couldn’t imagine a career she’d enjoy more. She even thought of a name for her possible future business not long after the notion had been born, and it stayed with her through all the years since. Seeing no reason to change now that she was turning it into reality, she stuck with *Streamers for Dreamers* as she forged ahead in early January. Her hope then was to have everything in place and ready to go before this week’s long anticipated trip, and she maintained a hectic pace over the next three months to meet that goal, and more. Having rented space just off trendy Las Olas Boulevard, in the heart of downtown Fort Lauderdale, she created a small but attractive showroom. After interviewing a myriad of florists, caterers, musicians, and set designers, she was satisfied she found the right people to help bring her ideas to fruition. Best of all, she already had three clients lined up.

The excitement she felt over her professional achievement only enhanced her heady anticipation of this week’s visit to her old hometown, and the ten-year high school reunion that triggered the plans. She just never expected the rollercoaster of emotions she experienced since she arrived on Wednesday.

While eager to see old friends and share reminiscences, she was bombarded by news of the Cubs’ opening day as soon as she got into town. The first mention she heard stopped her in her tracks. Recalling her family’s yearly attendance at the event, she bit her lip until it throbbed like her pulse, and she smothered a sob. That’s how it was throughout her visit. Everywhere she went, every place she saw evoked memories of a happy young life, and intensified the pain of missing her parents.

Wiping a lone tear from her cheek just as the horn of the approaching shuttle bus beeped, Deanna was glad for the diversion, and she clutched the handles of her two suitcases, ready to get on her way. Still, a sigh of longing escaped her as she settled into her seat, and as the cityscape began to roll by, she forced the gloomy thoughts from her mind, focusing instead on the good times she had during her visit.

She had looked forward to the reunion and renewing past acquaintances, but was especially glad she was able to get to Chicago two days before the reunion officially began, allowing her to join five childhood friends for private time spent reminiscing and catching up. The six girls remained close, but now lived in six states, and this was the first time they were all together since Rachel’s wedding two years ago. It was also the first time the others heard about the recent changes in Deanna’s professional life.

“I finally decided it was time to get back to what I really want to do,” she told them as they sat around a curved booth in the Cheesecake Factory, sipping their before dinner drinks on a very special night out. Seeing the encouragement and support in her friends’ expressions as she explained, Deanna was glad she waited until they were together to fill them in. “And I’m thrilled at how well it’s going so far,” she concluded with a smile.

Sharing her happiness, the group toasted to her success, and then proceeded to chide her good-naturedly about her almost nonexistent love life.

“I’ll take care of that when the time is right,” Deanna responded. “Right now, I want and need to focus on my business. But if it ever really gets that bad,” she added with a smirk, “I’ll go to the nearest bar and stay until I find the right guy to satisfy my needs.”

“That might be okay in the short term,” newly-engaged Jessica said, “but an occasional

one night stand can never replace the feeling of having that one special guy. I can't believe the difference Corey has made in my life."

"That's so true," Amanda agreed. She just moved in with her current boyfriend, in celebration of their first anniversary, and confided that he could be "the one," although nothing was official yet. "It feels so good to know there's somebody there for you. It wasn't until after I got together with Mark that I realized how lonely I had been."

"I'm not lonely," Deanna retorted, sounding unintentionally harsh. "I have friends, and I do date, but I'm just getting a business off the ground. For the time being, I really need to concentrate on that."

"Business schmizness." Jennifer waved the notion away like it was a pesky fly. She was the first of the group to get married and the only one to stay in Chicago. "We all admire and respect what you're doing, Dee, and we support you completely. But you still have to have a happy personal life. We know you too well. No matter how successful you become, it won't be enough if you don't have someone to share it with."

"Then, all of you," Deanna responded with a chuckle, "with my blessing, please wave your magic wands. Make Mr. Right appear before me."

Amy raised her glass in a toast. "So it is said," she proclaimed. "So it shall be done."

"Amen to that," Deanna said with a decisive nod, relieved the subject was closed. The girls all laughed, clinking their glasses together, and spent the rest of the evening gossiping and reminiscing, feeling as though they had never been apart.

Remembering the pleasure she'd felt with the old gang, Deanna smiled, still in awe of the great time they had. She was also surprised at how quickly the van seemed to arrive at the United Airlines terminal at O'Hare. Taking advantage of curbside check-in, she left her second suitcase with the skycap and wheeled the smaller one inside, taking long, purposeful strides as she weaved through the throng of people and hurried to the security checkpoint. While waiting her turn, her mind dwelled on her "no love life," as her friends called it, and her lack of a long-term relationship.

Listening to her friends talk about their relationships this weekend made her realize that it might be time to pay attention to that part of her life. She heard their well-intended advice and replayed it over and over in her mind, reluctantly recognizing how right they were. No matter how much she tried to deny it, she had to admit, at least to herself, that she did suffer sporadic bouts of loneliness and wished she could find that very special guy who was meant just for her.

While she had her fair share of dates, the last time she spent more than a few months with the same man was back in college, and that only lasted two semesters. After that, she realized she didn't want to invest the time and emotional energy on someone unless she saw potential for the future. She once imagined she would recognize the right man as soon as she met him. Sparks would fly and they would fall in love. Now she wondered if that was just an idyllic scenario born from reading too many of the romance novels she loved so much. However, she'd meant what she told her friends. For the time being, she had to stay focused on her budding business.

Still, she hadn't totally ignored her love life in her private moments. In the past weeks, she even entertained silly notions about finding someone this weekend, maybe reconnecting with a former boyfriend or meeting someone new. She'd had a strange feeling it could happen. She never mentioned it to anyone, but it was an idea, a romantic illusion that filled much of her alone time in the weeks before the reunion. Now that the weekend was over, she knew that wasn't to be, and she'd have to wait a bit longer for her love story to begin.

When she finally got through security, Deanna hurried to her gate, slowing as she neared the monitors, checking on her departure time. Seeing her flight still listed as “ON TIME,” she exhaled a small sigh of relief, but being all too familiar with O’Hare, she could only hope it wouldn’t change. She was ready to get home, eager to get her business into full swing.

She also felt small pangs of hunger as she made her way through the congested concourse and was glad she had almost two hours before her flight so she could get something to eat without rushing. Once she located her gate, she walked on, heading to Chili’s, a few gates away.

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Chili’s was abuzz with activity. The tables were full with travelers juggling meals, cell phones, and laptops, their multilingual chatter filling the air. Servers scurried about, snaking through paths lined with luggage, and a television screen flickered over the crowded bar.

At the far end of the bar, a young man nursed his beer as he perused the handwritten notes from today’s meeting. His business trip to Chicago had gone well, but was cut short by today’s urgent detour to New York, where he’d be finalizing the biggest deal of his career. A rush of excitement surged through him at the thought, reminding him of the need to e-mail his assistant about changes in this week’s agenda, and he pulled his BlackBerry from the briefcase on the chair next to him. Once the e-mail was sent, he checked his watch, and signaled the bartender for the check.

When he stood, reaching for the cash in his front pocket, he noticed a striking young woman out of the corner of his eye. Letting his gaze linger, he smiled as she came closer, giving him a better view of her alluring features.

The determined set of her narrow shoulders mirrored the delicacy and strength in her face that was framed by long auburn tresses falling in sensuous waves. He was drawn to her beautiful green eyes with sweeping lashes, and also liked the way her lavender sweater gave just a hint of the curves beneath. This was a girl he’d like to get to know. But now was not the time. He had a plane to catch, and a very important contract to sign.

“Excuse me. Is anyone sitting here?”

The young woman he had been watching was beside him, asking the question as she pointed to the chair that held his briefcase, her voice velvet-edged and strong. “Fortunately for you,” he answered as a strange sensation washed over him, “and unfortunately for me, I have a flight waiting and you have a choice of seats.” Wondering if she could detect the true disappointment in his voice, he turned to the bartender and handed him a twenty-dollar bill. “Her first drink is on me, the rest is for you.”

“Thanks,” Deanna responded, charmed by the sweet gesture from this tall, handsome man. Jolted, too, by an extraordinary vibration that coursed through her when she looked into his mesmerizing mahogany-colored eyes, she wished this was the guy her friends had promised would appear before her. “Maybe I’ll get to return the favor one day,” she offered, her voice bathed in hope.

With a friendly smile on his well-tanned face, he shrugged. “Stranger things have happened.” Those were his parting words as he picked up his briefcase and walked out of her life.

Watching him go, she admired the view, and felt a strange sense of loss.

CHAPTER TWO

Wednesday, April 26, 2006

Lined with an eclectic mixture of old world architecture and modern structures, Las Olas Boulevard in Fort Lauderdale is a popular destination for both locals and tourists from all over the world. With leafy trees dotting the narrow median, the city's most charming thoroughfare offers everything from chic fashion boutiques, gift shops, and art galleries, to memorable restaurants, bars, sidewalk cafes and nightclubs.

On this sunny afternoon, scattered puffy, white clouds floated across the brilliant blue sky. Shoppers, sightseers, and business people on their lunch hour packed the sidewalks as cars streamed up and down the street. At Café la Bonne Crepe, the tables on the canopied, outside terrace were filled with people savoring one of the last days before South Florida's summer heat and humidity would make outside dining impossible.

Josh Haber was seated on the crowded patio next to the three-foot high, wrought iron rail that bordered the sidewalk in front of the restaurant. He recently returned from a prolonged business trip and although he'd chatted regularly with his grandmother, he was enjoying this opportunity to update her in person about all the recent developments in his life. Watching her face, seeing the gleam of interest in her blue eyes, he was reminded again that she was the only person on earth who truly loved and cared about him.

She basically raised him since he was four years old, when his parents brought him to South Florida. Born in Buffalo, New York, thirty-two-year-old Josh barely remembered the blizzard of '77 that had paralyzed the city for three weeks, but it was enough to convince his parents they did not want to live through any more winters. Shortly after, the family moved to the warmer climate, which allowed their only child to spend more time with his maternal grandparents. Having made the move a year earlier, Anna and Norman Ross filled the void created by Josh's parents' attention to their careers.

Ronald Haber, Josh's father, was consumed by his work. As a vice president of sales for a major electronics corporation, he traveled extensively. When he wasn't on the road, he spent long days at the office, rarely coming home until Josh was in bed.

His mother, Gail, had been a homemaker in Buffalo, but shortly after the family arrived in Florida, she took advantage of her parents' willingness to babysit Josh. As soon as she got her family settled in their new home, Gail studied for and received her real estate license. Eventually, she earned her broker's license, opened her own office, and built a successful business that left no time for her young son.

Not that Josh minded. He never felt the warmth and attention from her that he saw between his friends and their mothers, and he would wonder why she didn't love him like she was supposed to. But one sad day, when he was ten-years-old, he decided he didn't love her anymore, either.

He had come home from school two days earlier to discover his beloved cocker spaniel, Pluto, was gone. As usual, his mother was busy at work, leaving his grandparents to explain that Pluto ran out of the house that morning and was killed by a car. Josh was crushed by the news, but forty-eight hours later, his devastation turned to rage when he overheard his mother talking on the phone.

"I finally got rid of that damn mutt," she said. "I couldn't stand it anymore so I told everyone that the beast got hit by a car. They have no idea I had the animal put down."

Josh wanted to scream when he heard that. He wanted to punch her, and hurt her like she hurt him. But he did nothing, and said nothing, never telling anyone what he found out. He also never felt the same about his mother.

Around the same time, his parents' arguments were gaining in both frequency and decibel level. After one particularly loud and nasty verbal battle, his father stormed out of the house.

Sitting in his room, Josh heard every word of the venomous exchange. He tried not to listen, but the harsh voices were impossible to ignore. Still, the angry slam of the door when his father left startled him and his whole body began to tremble. Afraid of how such a virulent argument might change his life, he stayed put for several minutes, hoping his mother would calm down before he approached her. When he finally did venture out of his room, he felt a knot in his stomach as he walked to the kitchen.

His mother was sitting at the table, inhaling deeply on a cigarette, while the fury he saw in her eyes made Josh wince. He was about to go back to his room when his mother noticed him.

"What do you want?" she asked in a hateful tone.

He stared at the floor and took a deep breath, searching for the courage to ask the questions that could evoke answers he dreaded hearing. "Why did daddy leave? Are you getting divorced?"

"Of course not," his mother responded, dismissing his fears so lightly that he felt stupid for asking. "We just had an argument. Your father will be back soon, we'll make up, and you'll forget all about it."

Josh had been eleven then, and scared of what might come, but his mother's staunch promises allayed his concern. By the time his twelfth birthday arrived, the divorce papers had been filed, and he knew he'd never trust his mother again.

But things worked out to his advantage. Josh's life saw much less turmoil after his parents separated, and his grandparents' loving involvement in his life erased almost all of the pain. They made sure that someone was there when he came home from school, and were in the stands at all of Josh's school and sporting events. If there was a problem of any kind, he invariably turned to his grandparents for compassion or advice, and grew to love spending his weekends at their beachfront condo.

When it came time for college, Josh chose the University of Miami. The highly regarded music business program was its main draw, but the campus's proximity to the beach and his grandparents was an added bonus. He was especially glad he was nearby when, during his junior year, his grandfather died less than two weeks after suffering a stroke.

The loss stunned Josh, and while the circumstances brought his mother back into his life momentarily, she made sure he would never want her to return. Although she promised Josh and

Anna to be readily available whenever either needed her for anything when her father first took ill, Gail barely took time out of her work days to visit her father in the hospital and, just hours after the funeral, resumed her normal schedule. She was not there to comfort her mother or son, or to help Anna deal with the legal and financial complexities that follow death. Disgusted by his mother's selfish behavior, Josh stepped in to help, strengthening the already close relationship he shared with his grandmother.

Eighteen months after Norman's passing, Josh graduated from college, and with Anna's blessing, left Florida for New York to attend law school at NYU. Knowing that a law degree would enhance his opportunities in the music business, he also realized that living in Manhattan would offer a chance to get started in the industry. Josh always loved listening to music, and long dreamed of somehow fusing his deep appreciation with a way to earn a living. The idea of music management never entered his mind until he was fifteen and he met Phil Levine, a neighbor of his grandparents who recently retired from such a career.

Mr. Levine's connections in New York even helped Josh land a job as a talent scout for a major record label. It was a good beginning, opening a lot of doors that got him on his way, even before he received his law school diploma.

After graduation, he stayed with the record company, gradually advancing through the ranks, until he felt ready and fully prepared to attain his ultimate goal of starting his own music management company. Since his career mandated extensive travel, no matter where he lived, Josh maintained his primary residence in Fort Lauderdale. He loved the beach, the weather, and the laid-back Florida lifestyle, and lived comfortably in his fifteenth floor condo, overlooking the Intracoastal Waterway, with an ocean view from the balcony.

He also looked forward to the time he was able to spend with his grandmother, and enjoyed doting on her when their schedules would allow. That had just been more difficult than usual this week. He'd returned two days ago from his most recent trip, which lasted almost four weeks and encompassed seven cities, but between time he had to spend at his office and Anna's full calendar of club meetings and card games, today was the first time they were able to see each other. And he smiled as he looked across the table at her, her face rapt with interest as he talked about music she could barely tolerate.

"So this trip was a success?" she asked.

"Absolutely. The group I went to hear in San Francisco turned out to be a lot better than I expected, and I found a club in Los Angeles that will be a perfect venue for the band I signed last month."

"And how was the weather?"

"It was beautiful just about everywhere," he said. "Except Chicago. It was freezing."

Anna laughed. "You wouldn't have felt that way if you remembered any of the bitter cold days in Buffalo."

"Maybe not, Grandma. But I'm glad I don't."

"Now what about your personal life, Bubbeleh? When are you going to start thinking about settling down? How long are you going to make me wait for great-grandchildren?"

"What do you mean?" he teased. "Aren't I a great grandchild?"

Anna laughed. "The best, but I want to be a great-grandmother."

"You already are. I don't know of any grandmother who's better."

She laughed again. "When did you become such a comedian? You know what I mean."

Straightening himself in his chair, Josh ran his fingers through his thick dark hair and smiled. He heard the questions before, but never let it bother him. He understood she wouldn't

be asking if she didn't care, or didn't have what she saw as his best interests at heart. "Aren't you the one who always told me things happen when they're supposed to?" he asked good-naturedly. "Doesn't that mean we both have to wait until the time is right?"

"Yes, but you still have to look to make sure you don't miss the moment."

"I do, Grandma. And it'll happen soon enough." Josh enjoyed his bachelorhood, and a plentiful supply of willing and available women who didn't let him get lonely. But because his rapidly expanding career demanded so much of his time and energy, especially now that he had a three-week European tour to prepare for in June, there was little room left for meaningful romantic entanglements. "For now," he explained, "I have to take care of business. Big things are happening for me."

"Haven't you realized yet that you can't let a career interfere with making a happy family life?" Anna asked. "Do you even find time with your busy schedule to date anyone?"

"I manage to fit them in," he told her, chuckling. "In fact, I have a date for tonight."

"Someone special?"

"You'll be the first, or maybe the third, to know." He shook his head and smiled, amused by the hope in his grandmother's voice.

Just then, Josh caught a glimpse of a shapely pair of legs in high heels walking toward the restaurant, their owner otherwise blocked from view by the husky man in front of her. Josh kept watching and was glad he did when the man turned and entered the art gallery a few stores down. The woman behind him deserved the lingering look. Dressed in a tailored beige business suit that flattered her impressive curves, she had a sexy bounce in her walk, and beautiful auburn hair that shimmered in the sunlight.

Suddenly, she slowed her pace and lifted her sunglasses from her eyes. That's when he recognized her. This was the same woman he admired in Chili's at the airport in Chicago, and he found her even more appealing today. She almost immediately replaced her glasses, but in that moment, Josh noticed a flash of recognition in her compelling green eyes as their gaze landed on him.

"Somebody you know?" Anna asked in a mild, interested voice.

"Not really," Josh answered distractedly, his gaze following the alluring woman as she walked passed, feeling flattered and intrigued when she glanced back for another look.

"Somebody you should know?"

"Maybe," he mumbled, wondering why this beautiful woman was suddenly fluttering in and out of his path.

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In the weeks since returning from Chicago, Deanna devoted almost all of her time to her career. Invigorated by the creative juices flowing within, feeling even more strongly than before that she made the right career decision, she also came to a startling, almost comforting, realization. Her hectic schedule buried the feelings of loneliness ignited by her friends in Chicago, while business related details diverted any worries about her personal life. For the time being, she was satisfied with the status quo, exhilarated by the challenges ahead.

At home this morning, Deanna reviewed her notes and rehearsed the presentation she planned for the man she was meeting this afternoon, potentially her most important client to date. Organizing the charity ball he had slated for November would be a huge step forward in her career, and having her name associated with that prestigious event could also help to open some very significant doors on the road to success. A nerve-wracking, yet strangely inspirational

tension filled her senses since today's meeting was first scheduled, and Deanna spent much of her time over the past week preparing. She even went shopping to find just the right outfit for this crucial moment and found the perfect ensemble in her favorite store. The simple beige linen skirt and jacket had classic lines and a business-like look, while still offering a sense of soft femininity and refined elegance.

When it was time to leave for the meeting, she took a deep breath as she picked up her portfolio and headed to the door. Once outside, she took in the brilliant blue sky on this perfect spring day and decided to walk to her showroom, only a half mile down Las Olas Boulevard. The close proximity to home was the major selling point when Deanna chose the site, and she often took advantage of the opportunity to stroll along the scenic boulevard, window shopping and people watching as she headed to work. Pedestrian traffic was lighter than it had been just weeks ago, with winter visitors and spring breakers gone, but there were always tourists around, mingling with the locals and business people who frequented the area.

Today, however, Deanna was too preoccupied by thoughts of her meeting to pay much attention to her surroundings. But just as the man she had been walking behind stepped into an art gallery, her gaze was drawn by a dark haired young man who seemed to be looking at her. He was seated at a table on the outside terrace of Café la Bonne Crepe, offering his dining companion a whimsical smile. He had a handsome face that stood out in the crowd, with broad shoulders and lightly muscled upper arms nicely accentuated by the soft blue knit polo shirt he wore. Embarrassed and flattered by his lingering stare, Deanna was glad she was wearing sunglasses that safely hid the fact she was staring back. And then she recognized him.

"Oh, my God," she muttered, slowing her pace as she lifted her glasses for a clearer look that negated any doubt. This was the same guy she saw at the airport in Chicago. She felt an immediate attraction that day, and it was even stronger today. Not that it mattered, she mused sadly to herself. They barely spoke then and she had no time now. Still, she couldn't help but turn back for another look after she passed by, curious about who he was with. Seeing the well-tended but much older woman sitting across from him, Deanna smiled to herself, although she wasn't quite sure why.