

Chapter 7: The Present

Rockefeller Center! Flags snapping in the wind around ice skating rink as excited tourists point and snap pictures. Pretzel stands. A woman with a cello on the steer corner, playing Ave Maria, her eyes closed in reverie as she sways, drawing her bow across the strings, a small circle of people gathered around her. The world almost seems normal here, the way it used to be, with people just living their lives.

Energy! New York vibrates with energy, and you look up at the sign that reads Rainbow Room, and up and up along the walls of Black Rock, the legendary media building that houses the headquarters of CBS, a thrumming epicenter of worldwide media and also the location of the one and only George H. Pearson of First Talent.

You take a deep breath, then another, and you almost want to pinch yourself because you can't believe you have a meeting with an agent- a for real agent- and this could be it, the big break you've been waiting for, and who knows? Maybe this time next year you'll be walking the red carpet before your first, big movie premiere!



Clutching your purse, you head into the building, pass through the security and under the ever-watchful eyes of a few Hive Soldiers. You crowd into the elevator: serious women in suits, pretty boys in skirts and blouses and it's all you can do to resist the urge to blurt out, "I have a meeting at First Talent." They wouldn't understand anyway. They are just regular people with regular jobs and you? You are an actress!

The elevator reaches the 41st Floor and two tall women are standing in your way as the bell rings and the doors whoosh open. "Excuse me?"

The women turn, look down appreciatively and move to give you room. "Of course, honey."

"Thank you."

"You have a good day now, doll."

Ugh. Women. Always so condescending. As you step out of the elevator, the entrance to First Talent is right there— the whole wall is glass, and you can see the receptionist— he's pretty— sitting behind the desk, filing his nails, office workers bustling to and fro behind him. You freeze, and for a moment you think you are going to turn and just get back on the elevator, go home. It's terrifying now that you are here, but the elevator doors slide closed, and you hear the bell again, "Bing"-- and hugging your purse to your side for courage you walk through the door to First

Talent, right up to the receptionist and you are *on*, and you are performing now in the role of the super confident and talented young, rising star Katherine Rose.

Hey. Your acting coach always told you to fake it till you make it.

“Good morning,” you say as the receptionist looks up at you. “I’m here to see George Pearson?”

He smiles back. “You must be Katherine Rose.”

“Yes. I am.”

“Right this way.”

You’d been expecting to be told to wait, to sit in reception for a half hour, but instead the receptionist, Millie, according to his name tag, leads you right to a conference room— a huge conference room, and George sits at the head of the table, looking over some documents. The room reeks of money and power. The mahogany conference table alone must have cost more than you’d make in 5 years waiting tables and George, in her 5000-dollar Armani suit, a 20,000-dollar gold watch on her wrist, looks like she was born to sit here in this power room, ruling the world.



As soon as you enter, she stands, smiles, looks you over and you can see the approval in her eyes— she likes your figure— and she meets you halfway, gathering you into her arms and hugging you tight.

“You look great,” she says. “Even hotter than I remembered.”

“You’re too kind,” you say, still playing your role, and you meet her eyes and there is heat there, there are sparks, and now you are wondering if this is all just an elaborate booty call.

“Would you like something to drink?” George asks as the slightly too long hug ends.

“I’m fine,” you say, slipping your purse from your shoulder.

“Bring us a pot of coffee,” George says, of course, ignoring you. “Please. Sit.” She pulls a chair out for you, and you sit. What if this is a booty call? And what if she is about to proposition you? Sex for representation? There was a time you’d sworn that you would never be one of *those* boys, the ones who slept their way to the top, but, well, sitting here now? Maybe a boy had to face reality, do what needed to be done and, besides, George is everything you could ever want in a woman— rich, powerful, confident.

She sits and lets her eyes drop to your breasts, then they rise back up to meet your eyes. “I watched your reel,” she says. She

lets that hang in the air, just looks at you after she says it, betraying nothing. Did she like it? Hate it? It's impossible to tell.

You'd sent her your acting reel, a series of scenes you'd had made— it cost 1000 dollars— that showed your range. Some great screams, crying scenes, you holding a laundry basket expressing concern. “Oh?” You say, not wanting to seem desperate, still playing the role.

“I also talked to Frank Wells about your audition.”

“You know Mr. Wells?” You say.

“I know everyone,” she says, covering your hand and giving it a squeeze.

Your heart flutters.

Millie returns with a tray, and she pours each of you a cup of coffee, then leaves. George lifts a small pitcher of cream and pours it into yours, the thick, white milk undulating as it splashes into the dark, black coffee. Then, she stirs two heaping spoonfuls of sugar in, the spoon clicking against the side of the China cup, the coffee turning a soft shade of tan. “I know you prefer a skim milk latte most days,” she said, “but when you really feel like indulging? Cream and sugar.”

“How do you know so much about me?” You say, feeling wary. She's being a little bit stalky, and it scares you, but also, well, considering who she is? You're a little excited, too.

“Try it,” George says.

You pick up the cup, pinkie out, and take a sip, never breaking eye contact with George, who watches you with a blazing intensity. “So good,” you say, and you lick the corner of your lip.

“I thought you would like that,” George says, sitting back, girl spreading, hands behind her head. “I make it my business to know everything about a client,” George says.

Client? Your heart starts to race. She said client, not potential client. Is this really happening?

“Katherine, I am more than just an agent. I take an interest, a personal interest, in each and every person I represent.” She looks up at the ceiling now, as if contemplating. “Branding,” she says. “A lot of my competitors would be talking about branding right now. Do you see yourself as a bottle of Coca-Cola, Katherine?”

You swallow. You know what she wants you to say, though you’ve been to a half dozen workshops on building your brand. “No,” you say, because she wants you to. “Never.”

George chuckles and looks back down at you. “I knew I picked the right one. I knew the second I saw you on the train. Dame Julie Dench is not a brand. She is an icon, a cultural force, a legend. She’s like an Olympian God, and she will go down in

history. She will be remembered. That, my dear, is what I want for you.”

She pushes the documents she'd been looking at when you came into the room toward you, and a silver pen appears in her hand as if by magic. She holds it toward you. “Sign.”



You look at the top sheet. The First Talent logo in raised letters. It's a contract and as much as you want to sign right then and there, your intuition starts buzzing. How many times have you been told, don't sign anything without reading it first? “Shouldn't I-
-?”

“Smart,” George says, nodding. “Smart Cookie.”

You start to lower the pen.

“All great relationships are built on trust, Katie. All of them. Do you trust me?”

“Yes?”

“Then show me you trust me.”

She stares. You blush. You sign.

George presses a button. “Team?”

The double doors to the conference room swing open and a crowd of people pushes into the room. “Everyone,” George says, taking your hand and helping you to your feet, throwing an arm over your shoulder. “I want you all to meet the newest star at First Talent. Let’s welcome Miss Katherine Rose!”

The room erupts in cheers and applause, and you’re caught in a whirlwind of hugs and congratulations and air kisses, and you feel light as air and you think, me? Is this really happening for me?

After, overwhelmed, confused, you find yourself in George’s office, which is bigger than your apartment. “You start tonight,” George says. “Ian Brook needs a date, and this will be a great way to introduce you to the world. Paparazzi will be everywhere.”

“Ian Brook?” You say, putting a hand to your chest. She is only the biggest action star in the world.

“See my assistant. She’s set up appointments for you with our stylists. You need to look perfect.”

“This is all so sudden.” You? On a date with a big movie star?
It’s too much.

“Just smile and look pretty,” George says. “Oh, and one more
thing.”

“Yes?”

She puts her hands on your shoulders now, and squeezes,
hard. It hurts, but you just smile. “Don’t fuck this up.”