

Honor and Hope

Chapter 1

“Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out.”

- Vaclav Havel

The flashing lights of a car parked precariously along the road caught his attention first, and then he saw her standing there, tears streaming down her face, looking frustrated and helpless. He gave a momentary chuckle; the irony of seeing her here along this roadway after nearly six years played across his face. He knew he should drive on and let someone else help her, but Will Darcy knew he could never do that. He swore years ago to always protect her even when she continually refused to have anything to do with him. He whipped his Mercedes to the side of the road and climbed out of the driver's seat. He stood for a moment by his own car realizing how scared she looked.

“Don't come near me,” she said as he stepped forward.

She said those words to him before . . .

“Hey, Will, check out our new neighbors,” Chuck called as they unloaded the borrowed van. “I knew I would like this resident hall.” Chuck Darcy loved college life—or one should say he loved college life's many conquests.

“Could we go one day without your checking out the local girls?” Will just shook his head when his younger brother went into “hunter” mode. He did not possess his brother's easy manner when it came to women. That was what was so odd; Will had it all—good looks, high intelligence, and athletic ability—yet, he never had a steady girl. Whenever a girl got too close, he became distant and reserved; soon the girl moved on to greener pastures. Chuck, on the other hand, fell in and out of love repeatedly.

“I'm going to see if they need any help.” Chuck grinned sheepishly.

“Great! More work for me!”

“Hi, there,” Chuck called to the two girls unloading cars in the lot. “Could you use some help?”

“That's nice of you,” the dark-haired girl answered first, “but we can handle it.”

“I didn't mean anything by it; I just thought I'd offer a few extra hands,” his natural affability showed through.

“You'll have to excuse my sister,” the blonde smiled, “she's been schooled by our father to not trust anyone. My name is Jane; this is my sister Elizabeth.” The dark-haired girl nodded at him, but her countenance did not change.

“I'm Chuck Darcy; that's my brother Will over there.” He gestured toward the tall guy carrying in a box of books. “We're in 1A.”

“We're in 1C,” Jane offered.

“So, we're nearly finished. Could we interest you in some help?”

“Sure, we could use help with the heavier things.” Her smile encompassed him, and Chuck gladly picked up one of the boxes and followed her into the building. The auburn-haired girl slammed the car door shut. She hated when Jane put her in these types of situations. Men flocked to Jane, the beauty; Elizabeth took the chances; her passion lay deep within.

Her thoughts took a dive when the taller guy approached. “My brother says you need some help.”

“Well, your brother is wrong!” she snapped. “If I can’t take care of it, I will ask for help.”

“Okay,” he said backing away. “I’ve got things of my own to do.” He turned to walk away, shaking his head in disbelief.

“Hey, I’m sorry,” she called to his retreating form. The guy turned around and looked at her. “My sister Jane attracts men like flies to honey; it upsets me how she leaves me to do the work while she flits off to her next conquest. You don’t deserve my anger, and, yes, I can use your help with the TV.”

“I’m . . . I’m Will,” he stammered, walking back towards her.

“Liz,” she responded. She moved the blankets she used to protect the TV in the car.

“I’ll get this; these flat screens are not usually too heavy.”

“Maybe not to someone of your size.”

Will turned to finally look at the girl. More petite than the blonde he met in the hallway, he found her beauty more classic than he first noted. She wore a baseball cap with her hair pulled through the opening, but he could tell it had a natural wave, which caressed her high cheekbones. Her watery green eyes danced with excitement. She tied the oversized T-shirt at her waist, but, obviously, she took care of herself physically.

“Are you a runner?” he asked nonchalantly.

“Yeah, how’d you know?”

“I’m an exercise physiology major. We pay attention to muscles and body tone a lot. We naturally guess a person’s chosen ‘sport’ based on his muscle tone. It’s a kind of game we play consciously and subconsciously. You’ve got little body fat, and your legs have those long, slow-twitch muscles usually seen in distance runners.”

“I ran the 5000 in high school,” she attested. “I finished tenth at States.” He smiled as if to confirm his suppositions. “So what about you? You’ve got your own muscle tone.”

“Football.” His smile got wider.

“Wide receiver or tight end?”

“Worse—quarterback.”

“First string? Are you any good?”

“Well, some sports magazines predict I will go in the top twenty of the NFL draft, but first, I have to get through this season unscathed.” He watched the girl to see her reaction.

“Really?” She looked surprised.

“Ask my brother,” Will acknowledged as he picked up the TV to carry it into the dorm room.

“Ask me what?” Chuck came to bring in another load from the car.

“Your brother is the football quarterback?” Liz seemed astonished.

“Yeah, that’s my brother the QB—Will Darcy. He will make the NFL easily.”

“I did not realize who he was. He isn’t what I expected for a QB. Where’s the swagger?”

“Will’s not like that,” Chuck looked toward where his brother entered the building. “He’s the quiet, serious type. Since our father passed, Will has provided for my mother, my baby sister, and me. He’s the most focused guy I know.”

The girl followed Chuck’s eyes and wondered about the man she just met. Will Darcy had a chiseled, broad shoulder physique and dark features. His slight Southern drawl seemed out of place when he said words like “unscathed.” She laughed ironically, her thoughts finally diverted by the reappearance of Jane and Will.

“How about once we get things moved in, we all go over to the UC and get some pizza or something like that?” Jane suggested.

“That sounds like a good idea,” Chuck chimed in.

“Liz has never been to the UC; we can indoctrinate her into what a person should and should not eat at the University Center.”

“You’ve never been to the UC?”

“I’m a freshman.” Liz looked embarrassed. “I’m here at Norton Hall because I’m part of the Freshman Leadership Institute.”

“Ooh, a brain and a beauty,” Chuck teased. At his words, Liz blushed quickly.

“Well, I’m afraid I can’t join you. I’m supposed to meet some of my offensive line at Harrill Hall. Plus, the cheese on the pizza is not the best to eat before a workout.”

“You’re not running plays tonight. Come on, Will, you need some down time.”

“Maybe next time.” He took the box left in the back seat and headed to the dorm.

Inside the double room he shared with Chuck, Will Darcy leaned back against the door and let out a few quick breaths. For some reason, he felt agitation in the pit of his stomach, but he could not determine its source. He closed his eyes and saw the image of the young, petite girl he just met in the parking lot. Something about her stuck with him. Taking a few more deep breaths, he purposely shook his head and set about unpacking the boxes stacked on his side of the room. He did not have time for pretty young girls who caused his world to tilt on its axis. He only had time for football and success—only then could he be truly happy.