
Chapter 2



“Are you okay?” Nick frowned a little. Lisa huffed out a laugh as she shook her head. “Yeah, I’m fine. Just wondering who that guy is and what he’s done with my brother.”

Nick nudged her shoulder with his. “Our boy is growing up.”

Lisa shook her head. “Please. You know better.”

“He’s been keeping a close eye on Darcy for a while now.” Nick went poker-faced as he looked past her to Del laughing at something Darcy had said.

“Look.” Lisa whispered. “Oh! She’s coming. Don’t look.”

“Look, don’t look,” Nick whispered in her ear, which tickled deliciously. “You’re going to have to help me out here.”

She gave him a swat. “Darcy, I’ll send you a text when I know what time we’ll be leaving. I can be flexible if you get stuck here.” Lisa huffed, glowering at Nick, and then wiped her hands on her napkin. “Nick, I’ll go upstairs with you. I need to make a list of fixtures to order.”

“I’ll be up there in a little bit.” Darcy glanced up when the door opened. “Out-of-towners?”

Lisa waved her away. “Go ahead. Do what you have to do.”

“I will.” Darcy narrowed her eyes. “He looks familiar.”

Lisa craned her neck, seeing a man and woman, both wearing suits. “Tourists?”

“I’d say not.” Nick got up, a frown on his face. “I remember the man. Agent Stafford.”

“FBI?” Lisa’s eyes opened wide. “What in the world are they doing here?”

Nick shook his head. “I don’t know, but I’m going to find out.” He kissed Lisa on the cheek. “I’ll meet you upstairs.”

“You will not. I’m going over there with you.” She put a hand on her hip. “We’re in this together, remember. For better or worse?”

Nick picked up their tickets and handed them to Darcy with a large bill. “Keep the change.”

“I’ll split it with Mandy.” Darcy took the money and whispered to Lisa. “Let me know what happens.”

“Will do.”

Nick put his hand on the small of her back as he led her to the table where the two strangers were sitting. “Agent Stafford?”

The gentleman looked up, recognition on his face. “Nick Woodward. Just the man I came down to see.”

“Your lucky day. This is my fiancée, Lisa Reno.”

Lisa cut her eyes toward Nick, noting the proprietary air accompanying what could almost be considered a scowl on his face.

The agent smiled pleasantly. “I remember you from last summer.”

“Were you part of the FBI team investigating the tunnels?”

They had come in and finished so quickly, that Lisa had barely seen them. Apparently, he had seen her.

“I was, and you’re the lady who was more concerned about a litter of kittens than the dead body rotting in the basement.” He chuckled and stood to shake her hand. “Special Agent Frank Stafford, Chicago Field Office. Special Agent Julia Rossi, Louisville Field Office.” Both agents flashed their badges.

Lisa shook his hand, and then Agent Rossi’s. “Guilty as charged. By the way, those cats are very good mousers.” She grinned and looked from one to the other. “What brings you to our small burg?”

Agent Rossi gave her peer a look of irritation, then focused on Lisa and Nick. “Forensics found evidence that the crime scene was contaminated. It seems that evidence from the investigation last year had been improperly processed, and that led us to believe there may be additional tunnels, perhaps hidden.”

Nick blanched a little, and Lisa felt it in the pit of her stomach. Her beautiful house. Was it going to be a crime scene again? *Please, God, no. Was it something she or Nick did while they were down there?*

Agent Stafford returned to his seat and gestured for Lisa and Nick to join them. “Would you like us to fill you in? Unless you’d rather go somewhere private?” The special agent looked around, seeming to mentally document every person in the café, including the uniformed customer coming in the door, making a beeline for waitress Mandy Reno.

Nick met the eyes of the new customer, Sheriff Clay Lacey, then turned and gave the agent a nod and half-grin. “May as well. I’ve got nothing to hide.” Nick and Lisa sat across from one another.

“I appreciate it.” He took a deep breath and looked across at his partner. “Agent Rossi wasn’t involved with the original

investigation, so the regional office thought it prudent to send new eyes down here, and since she was in the state—”

“I drew the short stick.” The young woman smirked at Nick and Lisa.

Agent Rossi wasn’t just pretty. She was gorgeous. Even other women would recognize that. Tall and willowy, she had nearly black hair pulled back in a heavy bun and almost perfectly symmetrical features. Italian? Maybe. She could be one of Michelangelo’s sculpture models.

Fortunately, Nick doesn’t seem to notice.

“Do we need to include Sheriff Lacey in this conversation?” Nick spoke abruptly.

Lisa glanced at Nick. The question surprised her.

“Not at this point.” Agent Stafford pulled a document out of his inside jacket pocket. “We do have a warrant to search the house and tunnels.”



DEL WALKED around the upstairs apartment waiting for his sister and future brother-in-law. What was keeping Nick and Lisa? He went to the larger bedroom with the bath attached. Darcy had moved all her stuff to the kids’ room, and they were doing their best to close the room off and keep from tracking dirt as much as possible. One of the things he’d learned a long time ago, from his dad, was to keep the woman of the house happy. Keeping Mama happy meant the project was happy.

Del shook his head. Dad had a point.

There was still a small amount of plaster on the walls in the bath they were transforming, but he had no illusions of being able to keep it. Between the plumbing and electrical, it was easier to rip it out and start over with drywall. It hurt his heart a little, ripping out the plaster.

He had an affinity for the craft. The history found in the layers of material, getting smoother as they went on: the thin strips of rough wood lath, the pressed-into-place scratch coat with lime, sand, and animal hair; the brown coat, smoother, without the hair of the first coat; and the thin, smooth finish coat.

It was a process where adding to the layer made it smooth, as opposed to wood, where sanding was required to remove the rough edges and splinters.

Plaster was experience. It was adding to what you already knew and making sense of it.

He took out his phone to check the time.

They'd better hurry up and get here before I start waxing poetic about plumbing fixtures.

Del shook his head and snorted. He wanted this project to be perfect. He wanted all their projects to be excellent, but this one was different. He wanted Darcy and the kids to feel safe.

The door opened downstairs and he could hear Lisa and Nick talking as they came up the stairs to the door he'd left open. They came in, Lisa still chattering.

"You don't think they'll seal it off again, do you?" His sister looked at Nick, a little fear and nervousness on her face.

"No, I don't think so."

"What's going on?" Del felt like he'd walked into the middle of a movie.

Lisa and Nick looked at one another. Nick spoke first. "Remember the FBI agent, Stafford, who was here last year when we found the tunnels?"

"Yeah?" Surely this wasn't coming back to haunt them.

"He's here again, and he has an agent out of Louisville with him this time." Nick shook his head. "I thought this was over."

"Just the two of them?" Del tensed.

Lisa was concerned "They think there may be another

tunnel down there, and there was evidence from last year that was overlooked, so they were sent back.”

“Do you need to go out there?” Del could see the worry on his best friend’s face, and his sister’s. “I can get the information about the apartment from Darcy.”

“You sure?”

Del waved them off. “Sure. I take it they want to go out there now?”

Nick took a deep breath and looked at Lisa. “They do. Lisa, you don’t have to go.” He rubbed his hand up and down her arm.

“Oh, I’m going all right.” She wrinkled her nose at him. “It’s my house too, remember? You can’t get rid of me now.”

He put his arm around Lisa. “Wouldn’t want to.” Looking up at Del, he shook his head. “Sorry, bud.”

“No worries. You go solve a crime, and I’ll solve the countertop choosing and the placement of the bathroom fixtures. Nothing I haven’t done without you a dozen times.”

Lisa sighed. “Then we’ll leave you to it.” She narrowed her eyes and poked him in the arm. “Don’t talk Darcy into any shortcuts that you know would make me mad.”

“Oh, it’s so hard to make you mad.”

“Watch it. I’ll have Darcy to myself tomorrow.” Lisa dipped her chin.

Del thought a second and realized he didn’t want Lisa to plant any negative thoughts in Darcy’s head.

With a point, a smile, and a wink, he responded. “Gotcha.”



NICK OPENED the passenger door of his new Ford F-150—his old one was destroyed in last year’s tornado—for Lisa to hop in. He got in behind the steering wheel, put the key in the

ignition, and then looked over at his love before starting the truck. “What’s going on in that red head of yours?”

She twisted her lips in an annoyed grimace. “Honestly, I can’t believe this is happening. About to follow law enforcement into the basement of our house. Again.”

He shook his head. He knew what she meant. Last year’s mystery had garnered more information about his own family than he wanted to know, but it had answered so many questions. Why did he get the feeling he’d learn even more this go-round?

“I’m sure this is just standard procedure when they come across additional evidence.”

She turned and looked him in the eye. “How was it contaminated? And why was the evidence not processed? I hate to think we did anything.” She frowned, the little line between her brows begging him to smooth it out. “It all seems a little fishy to me.”

He reached for her hand and drew it to his lips. “It wasn’t our fault. Let’s go and see what they want. At this point, I’d like to get it over with and seal off the entry to the tunnel.”

“I know. I’m torn.” She took in a breath. “Part of me wants to fill in the tunnel and forget it was ever down there, but then the history lover in me wants to know what happened. If we close it off, we’ll lose the opportunity to learn more.”

Nick started the truck and pulled into the street from his parking space along Broadway. Considering all three businesses in town plus the post office were on one side of the road, calling the main drag in Clementville “Broadway” must have been someone’s idea of a joke back in the day.

“It was enough for me to find out my grandfather was killed and left down there.” He shook his head. “And who killed him? His own father?”

“That doesn’t even bear thinking about.” Lisa shivered.

“Could be, though. Dad said his grandfather was a tough old bird, and if he’d been rum-running for decades, he had protected the business for a long time. Maybe Zebulon belonged to the lawless element that ran things in this part of the country.”

“We may never know.”

“Or we might learn something if we find another tunnel.” Nick turned down the gravel lane toward his house. “Will it be a problem if we can’t get in for a few weeks?”

Lisa sat, deep in thought. “No, it won’t. I’ve got enough to do finishing up Darcy’s apartment and wedding stuff. I’m almost done here.” She turned and looked at him with excitement. “Did I tell you that I—I mean WE—got the KitchenAid mixer?”

Nick laughed. “I’m so happy for us.”

She whacked him on the arm. “You’ll see. It makes making chocolate chip cookies a snap. Who knows? Maybe I’ll get up the nerve to make cheesecake?”

“In that case, I’m thrilled.” He cut a glance her way and put the truck in Park in the driveway of the house.

She reached out to touch his arm. “Are you okay?”

“I’ll be fine.” He winked at her and leaned in for a kiss. “You sure you don’t want to elope?”

“I’d love to, but Mel and my daddy would kill me.”

“Your matron of honor maybe, but your dad? He might be glad to get you off his hands.”

“Like I’ve been on his hands for the last five years.” She opened the door. “You getting out, or do you want to keep putting this off and talk about wedding stuff?”

“I plead the fifth.”