

Building

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by

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Dove Christian Publishers
P.O. Box 611
Bladensburg, MD 20710-0611
www.dovechristianpublishers.com
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ISBN 13: 978-0-9903979-5-3

Printed in the United States of America

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Chapter *One*

Distracted, Travis Mills straight-armed the breaker bar on the exit door as he was leaving the high-rise office building where he had just finished his first day as Head Security Officer. His brain was filled with all manner of first-day information. Otherwise, he might have exited the building in a less rushed manner. He might have noticed the petite brunette attempting to enter the same door from the outside, her arms balancing a tray of coffee cups and to-go lunch bags.

Instead, the door flung open and slammed into the brunette, dumping coffee and bags of food on the ground where she landed with a shriek and an ‘ommmff.’ Startled and more than a little embarrassed, she glanced up at him with wide brown eyes, her hands supporting her on the hard concrete sidewalk.

“Shoot!” Travis was horrified when his brain processed the scene in front of him. He hurriedly hunkered down and held out his hand to her.

“I’m so sorry! Here, can I help you up?” *What a way to meet a pretty lady.* His brain called him all sorts of names for up-ending her. *Next time pay a little more attention, dummy! Before you end up hurting someone!*

“In a hurry?” the brunette asked in a slightly annoyed tone, but with a small smile lifting her lips. She accepted his hand and tried to gain her footing among the mess that had once been lunch for the office she worked in.

“I’m so sorry,” Travis said again, feeling at a loss to find better words to express himself. “I wasn’t paying attention I guess.”

Well, duh, Mills. Get it together!

The brunette swept her hands down the sides and back of her black pencil skirt, trying to knock off any dirt and leaves from her recent trip to the sidewalk. Her pink top followed her curves and was complementary to her rosy cheeks.

Travis wondered if her cheeks were always rosy, or if it was his fault for knocking her over. He bent and began to collect the scattered lunch bags and coffee cups. All but one of the coffees were on their sides and empty, their lids scattered, with puddles of coffee surrounding each cup. Travis felt like a heel, looking at the mess he had caused. *I am such a jerk!*

The brunette joined him in collecting the trash and seeing what would be salvageable. One lunch bag must have cushioned her backside, seeing as how the contents resembled a pancake more than a sandwich at the moment.

“I think these bags are okay,” Travis offered tentatively, setting them to the side, “but I am afraid that bag and these coffees are a tad worse for wear.” He indicated the bag she was holding, and the now-empty cups he had stacked back in the cardboard tray.

“How this one survived the *mêlée*, I will never know,” the brunette said, joking, holding out the single survivor, a coffee with the lid even still intact.

Travis smiled for the first time since realizing he had caused such a mess. He gave her points for keeping her sense of humor in the situation.

“Other than the obvious mess I managed to make, are you alright?” Travis asked seriously, noticing her wince as she shifted her weight to one foot.

“I’ll live,” she responded, “but I think I got something stuck in my shoe.” As she lifted her foot out of the offending shoe, Travis noticed the bright pink toenails on cute little toes. She reached down and knocked the small piece of gravel out of her shoe and slid her foot back into place. “That’s better,” she said and looked back up at him.

“Can I go get you fresh coffees and replace whatever food I managed to mangle?” Travis offered, feeling like that was the least he could do to make amends. He stuck his hands in his pockets and awaited her response. An excuse to spend a few more minutes in her lovely company wouldn’t be a bad thing either, he decided.

She considered her answer. “Well, my first response would be to say it’s okay, and don’t worry about it. But considering those were lattes, I think there are about twenty bucks on the ground here.” She sighed and took a deep breath before admitting, “And until payday, I really don’t have that to spare.”

Her backside hurt, as did her right hip, which took the brunt of her fall, along with the sandwich, she supposed.

It was obvious by the look on the young man’s face before her that he felt awful about knocking her down. She had seen a glimpse of a dimple in his cheek when he smiled before, and she wanted to see it again. Then, feeling like a ninny for even thinking that, she resolutely walked over to the garbage can that stood just outside the exit door and discarded the trash they had collected. Her hands felt sticky and gross, and she noticed a coffee stain on the lower part of her new pink shirt, worn for the first time today. *Well, that’s just par for the course I guess. I hope it washes out.*

“Tell me what I ruined, and I will gladly go get it all re-made,” Travis offered, indicating the coffee shop across the street.

She hesitated. This was a man she didn’t know, albeit a polite one and definitely a cute one. But then again, the coffee shop was just across the street and in a public place.

“We can walk over there and get this fixed,” she acquiesced, bending to gather the remaining bags of salvaged food.

Travis noticed and appreciated her curvy backside and mentally slapped himself and looked away, hoping his neck wasn’t turning red. This whole being a Christian thing was still relatively new to him. Even though he grew up in church, he

hadn't taken it seriously until college. Before, he would have simply enjoyed the view and thought nothing of it.

"Here, let me help you carry those," he offered, holding his hands out for the bags.

She handed him two of the bags and carried the third one herself.

Together they crossed the busy street at the crosswalk. Travis noticed her head barely came to his shoulder. At just a smidge over six foot tall, he guessed her height to be no more than five foot two. He grinned. His fifteen-year-old sister was taller than that!

He shifted the bags to one hand and opened the coffee shop door for her. She smiled at him, said 'thanks', and slipped inside. He listened to her place her order and handed the barista his credit card when it was time to pay. He could see a blush returning to the young woman's cheeks.

"What name should we call for this order?" the barista asked, handing Travis his card back.

"Faith," the brunette said.

Faith. Faith. Faith. Faith. Travis repeated to himself, wanting to commit her name to memory. They walked to the far counter to await the drinks and food.

"I am so sorry. And I know I have said that already, but I don't generally make it a habit to knock pretty ladies down," Travis said sheepishly, stuffing his hands in his pockets again. His khaki pants and blue button up shirt felt out of place to him, since he normally wore navy uniform pants and white shirt. His new uniforms had not arrived yet. Today was mostly paperwork anyway, and it hadn't mattered much what he wore. He hoped by Monday his uniforms would arrive for his first official day on the job. Maybe then, he wouldn't feel like such a misfit looking at the young woman before him. *Faith*, he reminded himself.

"I'm just thankful the door didn't hit my nose or cheek," Faith responded, impishly. "A black eye or bloody nose would

have been much worse, and certainly harder to explain to my boss.” She folded her arms across her chest and tilted her head to the side. *Did he just say I was pretty?* She was sure he didn’t mean it, but it was rather sweet to hear.

Travis grinned, his dimple making an appearance again, to Faith’s enjoyment. His gaze fell to her sleeve and noticed a coffee stain, and several smaller spots that probably were splatters of lattes. *Does coffee wash out?* Feeling worse than he already did, Travis brought Faith’s attention to the spot on her sleeve.

“Oh, shoot,” Faith said, inspecting her sleeve. “I didn’t see that, only this one,” she replied, gesturing to the spot on the hem of her shirt. The silky pink material was dry clean only. The tone-on-tone embroidery along the scooped neckline was what she loved about the blouse, even though she normally didn’t buy dry-clean-only clothing because of the expense. One small pearl button fastened the keyhole opening at her collarbone. Though she knew it was strictly for show and sewn in place, she liked the detail it added.

Travis thought she mumbled something about Murphy’s Law of new blouses. He was about to ask what she said, but she excused herself to the ladies’ room to wash her hands and examine her shirt for more coffee stains.

He waited patiently for Faith to reappear, trying to think of a way to ask for her phone number without sounding pitiful or stalkerishly freaky. His brain was still sorting out possibilities when Faith walked back to his side.

“I was going to put water on the spots, but then I wasn’t sure that was a good idea, since it says *dry* clean only on the tag.” She gave him a chagrined smile and shrugged her shoulders.

A light bulb went on in Travis’ brain. “Let me get it dry cleaned for you!” he said, just a tad too eagerly. He saw her eyes widen at his enthusiasm. He toned it back a bit and cleared his throat, “Since, I, uh ... messed it up and all, it seems only fair I should fix it ... right?” His smile had a little boy appeal

that made Faith relax and return the smile.

“You don’t need to do that, really,” she replied, accepting the carry-out tray of lattes from the barista. The barista went to get a freshly made sandwich and some extra napkins, as requested by Faith.

Travis, working for a low-key response, said, “I think it isn’t fair for you to have to pay for the dry cleaning, when I’m the fool who knocked you down and caused such a mess.”

“You’ve already fixed that,” Faith replied, lifting the sandwich bag and tray of lattes in explanation.

Travis took the lattes from her hand, balanced them along his arm, and with his hand holding two lunch bags, opened the door for her to exit ahead of him out of the coffee shop.

Faith paused outside the shop, and shifting the two lunch bags she carried to her arm, she reached for the other two bags of food and the tray of drinks. Travis shook his head and kept them in his grasp.

Faith sighed, and they crossed back to the office building where she worked. Travis tried to accommodate her shorter legs and steps, but she easily took two or more for every one of his. Not that she seemed to notice, she was walking with purpose.

“I have been gone so long, they will think I have gotten lost,” she quipped, nearing the exit door where the whole fiasco started.

Travis started to apologize again, but Faith stopped him. “I am just teasing you. I tend to hide behind humor when I am stressed. No worries.” He nodded, smiling slightly. He wanted to ask if he was the reason she was stressed, but thought better of it.

At the door again, Faith reached to take the tray of drinks and remaining bags from him.

“No, ma’am. I am seeing this,” indicating the food he carried, “safely to its destination. After all, I have a vested interest by now.” He chuckled.

Faith rolled her eyes and turned to open the door for Travis to enter. He followed Faith up one flight of stairs and into the lobby area.

The elevator doors swished open. After waiting for the passengers to exit, they stepped into the elevator themselves, juggling bags and drinks.

A man near the number panel asked what floor. Faith told him floor thirty, and stepped to the back of the car near Travis.

Great, Mills. Perfect. First girl you meet in years that is worth a second look and you knock her down and ruin her blouse. What a great first impression.

Travis' brain tried to think of innocuous small talk. They visited easily.

The elevator stopped, loaded and unloaded several times during their conversation.

At the ding, Faith glanced up. "Oh, next stop is mine." Straightening up from where she had been leaning against the wall, she was ready to step forward when the car stopped.

Travis followed her out of the elevator, then the doors slid closed behind him.

"I've got it from here, please," Faith said and reached out to take the food and drinks from him.

Travis balked. "I can take you the rest of the way, not a problem."

"I know you can," Faith said patiently, "but I would rather avoid the office gossip and handle this myself. I'm already going to get grief because of being late getting back."

"All the more reason I should help you," Travis said stubbornly.

"Please, let me have it," Faith pleaded, knowing her afternoon, ... heck, the rest of her week, would be so much more stressful if this handsome man accompanied her to the office.

Travis saw the look of panic on her face and relented, though reluctantly. He helped her balance the tray of drinks and the bags of food and watched her walk down the hallway.

“Goodbye, Faith,” he called softly, but loud enough she heard.

Faith looked back over her shoulder and smiled. No hand was free to wave. She hoped her smile was thanks enough.

Travis punched the elevator button, watching Faith continue down the long hall.

Faith pushed open the office door to Tegan & Sons and entered the reception area. As receptionist, she did a little bit of everything that needed doing, not the least of which was ‘go-fer’ whenever Mr. Tegan wanted an expensive caffeine fix from the coffee shop across the street. She also made copies, answered phones, did filing, billing, and stocked the restroom with toilet paper, paper towels, and hand soap. Thankfully the building had a cleaning service that cleaned the restroom. She also had inherited the job of watering decorative plants - three in the reception area and two in the conference room. She was not good with plants but so far had not murdered the plants in her care. However, only three weeks here might not have been enough time to do so, she supposed.

Norma sat at Faith’s desk, fielding phone calls and proof-reading briefs and other legal documents. Norma was about 50, not much taller than Faith herself, but at least double Faith’s size. She was motherly and caring, and Faith loved her already. Norma’s reddish blonde hair came from a bottle, and she freely admitted it. She claimed her two grown sons had stolen her favorite feature, her hair color, and left her grayer than anything else. That they were both happily married and one expecting her first grandchild, made it all worthwhile, Norma always said.

Faith placed the arm full of sustenance on her desk.

“I was starting to worry about you,” Norma chided as her eyes noticed the coffee stains on Faith’s shirt. Her eyebrows

raised as she gave Faith a pointed look and asked what happened.

Faith sighed. “I was bumped into on my way back from the coffee shop, and this,” she said, gesturing to her shirt, “is collateral damage.”



Chapter

Two

Laughter filled his ear as Travis waited for his twin brother to stop finding such humor in the story of his day.

“Seriously, Trev. It isn’t that funny.”

“Yes ... it is ...” and Trevor was off on another round of laughing.

Travis rolled his eyes. His twin was his best friend, but also his biggest annoyance at times. “Okay. I’m hanging up now,” Travis threatened and paused only long enough to hear his brother take a deep breath and try to smother another chuckle.

“Are you finished?” Travis inquired, not as annoyed as he was trying to sound.

“Yeah. Mostly. No promises,” Trevor snorted.

Travis rolled his eyes again. “So tell me about *your* day then, funny man.”

“Um, I went to work, managed to *not* knock down any hot females, and came home. That about covers it, I think.” Trevor said mockingly.

“I didn’t say she was hot!” Travis protested, feeling sixteen again instead of twenty-six. His ear-piece for his cell phone left his hands-free to visit while packing the last of his moving boxes.

“So, you are saying she is *not* hot then?” Trevor asked, knowing his brother was embarrassed, but enjoying himself too much to back off yet.

Travis sighed. “Alright, so she was hot! Happy now?” He ran the tape dispenser around the box he had just filled and labeled. The clock on the microwave in his kitchen said 8:10 p.m. He still

hadn't had supper.

"Ask her out yet?"

"Dude, I don't even know her last name." He wished he did, Travis acknowledged to himself.

"What was her first name again?"

"Faith," Travis said absently, stacking the sealed box on top of several others.

"And she works in your new building? Right? She should be easy to track down," Trevor said around a bite of the pizza.

Travis was trying to be sensible about the whole incident, but truly there was nothing he would like more than to track her down and ask her out. But he didn't want to come across as stalker material. He could still feel her soft hand gripping his as he helped her off the sidewalk. Who knew skin could be so memorable? He could also still picture her flashing brown eyes smiling into his on the elevator ride. He found himself grinning.

"What time should I expect you tomorrow, man?" Trevor asked after a few more minutes of ribbing his twin about Faith.

They discussed the next day briefly before saying good-night.

Travis finished his packing around eleven p.m. and realized there was nothing to eat. His body was exhausted. He tried to decide what was worse: going to bed hungry or not going to bed for another hour while he went to find something. Sleep won out and he fell onto his couch, pulled up the soft couch throw and fell asleep, his small furry companion, Nemo, asleep on his legs. A pounding on his door woke him at six in the morning. Nemo's barking made a rousing chorus.

He shook his head to clear out the cobwebs of sleep. *The Movers!*

He lurched to his feet and hurried to the door, still not completely awake.

The movers looked grumpy.

Nemo was frantic with excitement.

Travis' stomach grumbled, and he realized he hadn't eaten since lunch the day before.

It was going to be a long day.

Why have I agreed to come to the gym with Lily?

Faith felt very self-conscious. Around her were many well-toned and well-muscled bodies, and here she was, overweight, out of shape, and pale as a ghost. The tank-top and capri pants she wore felt cute at home. Here all she felt was nervous. She patted her hot pink headband, which matched the tank-top she wore.

"This is a great way to meet guys," her friend Lily gushed, leaning her blonde head close to Faith's brunette one as they walked toward the ladies' locker room.

And here I thought we were trying to be healthier. She loved Lily, but sometimes they just were not on the same wavelength. Lily reminded Faith of a butterfly. She flitted from thing to thing, job to job, man to man. She always seemed to land in good places and meet nice people, but she never stayed in one place very long.

Lily was several inches taller than Faith and probably twenty pounds lighter. The combination of more height and less weight meant that Lily much more slender. The difference felt huge, pardon the pun, to Faith.

Lily wanted to meet guys at the gym. Faith figured the odds of any guy seeing her at the gym, with her sweaty, pale skin and shapeless body in exercise gear, and wanting to ask her out, were basically nil.

She dutifully followed Lily to the locker room and placed her purse and water bottle in the locker, letting Lily secure it with her combination lock.

Having come to the gym for nearly a year, Lily was the expert, so Faith determined to follow along and do what Lily did.

Lily led them from machine to machine, explaining how

each one adjusted and helping Faith try things out. It was enjoyable in some ways, though Faith felt like an inept nincompoop at times. While Lily was on the elliptical trainer, Faith was able to get her stationary bike programmed and start her twenty-five minute session. Her leg muscles burned, but the bike was much more her speed than some of the other machines.

By the end of twenty-five minutes, Faith was feeling pretty good. Her leg muscles were numb and like Jell-O, but she was on a good endorphin high by that point. She had been listening to her praise and worship music the whole time on her iPod, and that always helped her outlook.

Walking back to the locker room, Faith felt like a drowned and drippy squirrel. She didn't *glisten* like other ladies did. She dripped sweat. It soaked her hair, her tank top, her headband, her bra. She felt stinky and gross, but a glow of accomplishment followed her home.

A cool shower and light supper later, Faith felt a tad more human and significantly less gross.

Tomorrow night was her first date with Jordan Tegan, the younger brother at the law office she worked for, but she hadn't told Lily. She knew her friend would be happy—too happy, Faith was afraid—and she didn't want the pressure.

Faith hadn't been on a date since college. She had dated a few times as a teenager and college student, but not in the five years since she graduated from community college. At almost twenty-six, she felt silly for being so nervous about a trip to the movies.

They were having dinner after the movie, someplace low-key, Jordan had assured her. What was low-key to him? Probably not a place with golden arches, or a pizza buffet. Maybe something like an Italian place or rib joint?

Faith was torn between what to wear. It was ridiculously hot this summer, so capris instead of pants, but probably not shorts, although she had a navy skort that was cute on her that

she could dress up or down. She had used some self-tanning foam after her shower, and her legs were freshly shaved. The arctic white skin was gone, replaced by a lovely warm golden hue that looked more natural than she had anticipated.

She mentally flipped through her shirts. She wanted something more casual than she wore to the office, but not as casual as a tee-shirt. She had a white sleeveless top with lace along the neckline, and a coral colored flutter cardigan that was super cute. She had some coral and silver bangle bracelets to wear with a necklace of beads in the right colors with a silver pendant and earrings to match. That would dress up the outfit nicely.

Faith prepared for bed, brushing her teeth and turning off lights. She climbed beneath the cool covers of her soft bed and sighed in contentment. It had been a busy week, ending with such a crazy day today.

Faith smiled softly into the dark room. Travis had been very sweet about the whole debacle, his dimples endearing. His hand had been firm and smooth as he helped her up after her fall. His touch lingered in her memories.

Why am I thinking about him? I'll never see him again, I am sure. I don't even know his last name.

Faith resolutely rolled over, snuggling deeper into her pillows and blankets and let slumber sweep over her.

The next day was Saturday. Faith's doorbell rang about three p.m. Jordan wasn't due for two more hours. Faith peeked out the peephole in the door and saw Lily standing there.

"Hi, Lily. What brings you out and about today?" Faith said with a smile for her friend. Lily walked into Faith's apartment and closed the door behind her, shutting out the heat of the summer afternoon.

She flopped onto Faith's beat-up couch, a relic acquired

from the local thrift store several years ago when Faith first moved into her apartment. Time had made the couch more comfortable but not more attractive. Lily pulled one of Faith's bright colored throw pillows into her arms and huffed.

"Lil, what's wrong?" Faith asked, seeing the clouds of gloom hovering over her friend's face. She perched on the arm of the similarly salvaged armchair that was her favorite piece. Though not any prize winner in the looks department, it was huge and comfortable.

"You know that guy?" Lily asked, smooshing the pillow to her chest.

Faith tried not to smile. With Lily, that could mean any one of a half-dozen guys she had mentioned in the last month alone.

Lily nodded. "Why do men act like they like me and then never call me back?"

Faith commiserated for a few minutes with her dearest friend. As much as Lily could be a flake, she was a sweetie at heart and had stood by Faith through a lot of tough times. Like the departure of her dad and the death of her mom.

Faith sighed and hugged her friend, slipping onto the couch beside her. *Time for a distraction*, she decided, whether she really wanted to or not. "Sooooo, I have a date tonight." She dropped that tidbit into the air and waited for the coming explosion. Jordan had asked her out several times before, but she had never agreed.

Lily's head bounced up, and she stared at Faith for a long minute, before a squeal popped out of her mouth.

Questions tumbled out of Lily's mouth faster than Faith could answer. All she could do was smile and be pulled along to the bedroom to try on every outfit she owned, twice. They finally chose the outfit she had mentally preferred anyway.

A glance at the time warned Faith that she needed to do her hair and make-up. Jordan would arrive in about thirty minutes.

Faith styled her hair in a simple French braid down the back

of her head, but flipped the end up at the bottom and clipped it with a coral bow. Faith's hair had some natural curl and the wisps around her face refused to be tamed. Faith mostly ignored them. Lily loved them.

Lily insisted on doing Faith's make-up, and Faith allowed it. Lily was talented at that sort of thing. Lily chose coral eye shadow that made Faith's eyes glow, along with a bronze eye-liner that made her eyes look bigger. A dash of mascara, some mineral powder and a glaze of shimmery lip gloss, and Faith was ready. Nervous, but ready.

"So, I get why you said no before, but why yes now?" Lily inquired as she finished Faith's face.

Faith was at a loss. She wasn't sure why she had said yes. Jordan's attention was flattering, she could admit that. He was handsome, rich, powerful, and genuinely funny. However, she doubted there would be a second date. This was more about the experience.

She knew Jordan wasn't going to be content with her in the long run. Unlike him, she didn't drink. Unlike him, she didn't go to clubs. She wouldn't be sleeping with him either. Thankfully, Jordan knew that about her. In his nosiness, the subject had been brought up, to her mortification. Yet, knowing that, he still asked her out. Her brain kept going back to Travis, the cute interruption the day before. She fleetingly wished it was his face that would be appearing at her door any minute.

"I don't know, Lil. I don't know."