

CHAPTER ONE

Audrey Brubaker said it was completely innocent. She wanted to be perfectly clear on that point. She had gotten the idea, she said, from that movie with Audrey Hepburn, *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, where a young woman in New York City hangs out with rich businessmen and gets paid for going out to dinner and being nice to them, and she believed the similarities—having the same first name and being a country girl trying to make it in a big city—was a sort of providential message. What she would do, she said, was to go in the afternoon to the lobby of one of the big hotels—the Saxony or the Cosmopolitan or the Pantlind—and strike up a conversation with a man who looked like a successful businessman. After making small talk for a while, which she was good at, she would ask him if he'd like to take a walking tour of downtown Grand Rapids. Almost always the businessman would say yes. And then she would take him for a walk around the city, explaining the history and pointing out the important buildings and who the streets were named for and what the statues were about. When the walking tour was over the man would give her ten or twenty dollars, and often he would ask her to have dinner with him.

“And that's my livelihood,” Audrey said. “That and the Rexall lunch counter.”

“What if the men, you know, get fresh?”

She gave me a crafty smile, as if she was going to tell me something interesting that I would like to know about.

“They almost never do,” she said. “Businessmen are lonely, more than anything else. They just want someone to listen to their jokes or sit with them on a park bench while they brag about their kids or pour out their tales of woe.”

“But what if they *do* get fresh?”

“There are ways to handle it,” she said. “A hug or a kiss on the cheek will go a long way.” She looked at me with a knowing expression, as if she were letting me in on a secret only a few people understood. “In my opinion, sex is oversold.”

We were sitting in the Starlight Lounge after one of Audrey’s clients—a Mr. Smollett of the North American Ball Bearing Company—had walked out. I sat back in the booth with Smollett’s drink in my hand and I thought about what Audrey had said and whether I could believe her. I tried to picture her hugging Mr. Smollett and whether that would work. Whether that would be enough.

“I saw that movie with Audrey Hepburn,” I said. “I saw it last year with my girlfriend. And I remember the girl went out to dinner with rich businessmen. But I don’t remember her giving tours.”

“I added that part,” Audrey said. “I think it’s an improvement, frankly. It’s like I’m doing them—the men—a little favor, like Dale Carnegie says you’re supposed to do.”

That was another one of her peculiarities, a passion for Dale Carnegie and how he could teach you how to win friends and influence people so you could have a better life. But I’m getting ahead of myself. I should probably say how I met Audrey in the first place because that explains a lot about what came later, like the time we broke into Audrey’s parent’s house, and our trip to northern Michigan to bring my brother’s body home. That would be the logical place to start, which is something, logic, I think I’m pretty good at.