

Lost in Manhattan

by Emma Carlyle

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“What made you suspect?”

Abel Montgomery puffed at the cigar that was as much a part of him as his ten fingers. He raised his head from the papers which had held his attention, exhaled a large puff of gray smoke, and looked across the desk at his longtime friend and attorney, John Ferguson. “He couldn’t look me in the eye. Never trust a man who can’t look you eye-to-eye, John.”

“That’s all?”

“That’s enough. Enough to raise my suspicions, anyway.” Abel tapped one of the papers with his index finger. “And now you’ve confirmed them.”

“Which explains your reason behind this.” John handed him a sheaf of documents and a pen. “All changed, just as you spelled out.”

Abel quickly perused the pages before dating and signing his name to them.

“How do you want to handle the situation?”

Abel pushed his chair back, rose, and turned to stare out the window of his corner office. Thirty-seven floors below people scurried along Lexington Avenue, most probably anxious to end the work week and begin the Labor Day weekend.

Abel, too, had been looking forward to the short holiday. The pressures of the past few weeks showed. The pains in his chest had increased, and no amount of Zantac or Maalox helped. He knew he should see a doctor, but there never seemed to be enough hours in the day. All he really needed was a relaxing three-day weekend alone with Whitney. She was the best medicine for his aches and pains. She could wipe years from his life in a matter of minutes.

“Abel?”

“Hmm?”

“I asked how you want to handle this. Are you feeling all right?”

“Never better. I’ll take care of things. Let’s keep this under wraps for now. I don’t want anyone else to know yet. Okay?”

“You’re the boss, but if you want some friendly advice, you should quit that vile habit.” John gestured toward the cigar. “It’s going to kill you someday.”

“I’m an old man. If they haven’t killed me yet, they’re not going to.”

“As your attorney, I feel obligated also to remind you that you’re in violation of a city ordinance against smoking in public buildings.”

“You going to turn me in?” Abel chuckled. When John didn’t answer, he took several puffs before continuing. “I didn’t think so. Now, get out of here. Enjoy the weekend.”

John reached for the papers spread across Abel’s desk.

“Leave those. I’d like to study them further.”

“No problem. Try to relax this weekend. You look tired. I’ll see you Tuesday.”

Alone in his office Abel poured himself another cup of coffee from the pot his secretary kept filled on the credenza. Settling back into his desk chair, he studied the printouts yet again. Anger built within him.

Damn greedy, fucking son-of-a-bitch! He’d treated the man like a son, like the son he’d lost, groomed him to take over the company some day. And this was his thanks. Stabbed in the back by a common thief. If it weren’t for Sarah, he’d have the bastard hauled off to jail.

Sarah. God, she’d be devastated by this.

One of the brighter young members of Abel’s staff, Roger Caine caught Abel’s eye early. Roger’s polished charm and take-charge attitude paved his way up the corporate ladder with breakneck speed until he sat perched on one of the highest rungs.

When Cameron and Hollis died so suddenly, Roger had stepped in and kept the company running while the family dealt with its grief. Now, too late, Abel realized that Roger was an opportunist who’d taken advantage of a tragic situation. But had this always been his agenda, or had he seized the opportunity when fate dropped it in his lap?

All the caring, all the concern. Was it a carefully staged act? Even his feelings for Sarah? Roger had been especially attentive to her after the tragedy. The accidental death of her parents had left her with deep emotional scars, her liveliness and independent nature becoming additional casualties of the explosion that had taken her parents.

Roger had helped Sarah through those dark days, and Sarah responded by falling in love with him. Aware of the powerful healing nature of love, Abel and his wife had encouraged the relationship.

But Sarah’s pale blue eyes, which once danced with laughter, now often reflected hurt and unshed tears. Abel suspected the marriage was in trouble and blamed himself for his granddaughter’s unhappiness. He’d encouraged the union between his brightest executive and his sole surviving heir. And Sarah, God love her, would do anything to please him.

What had he done to his granddaughter?

Abel opened the bottom drawer of his desk, removed a large bottle of Maalox, and chug-a-lugged the antacid. Then he spun his chair around and stared out at the darkening late afternoon sky. Dense thunderclouds, an ominous precursor to a weekend wash-out, had skulked in from across the river. He watched them build in mass, casting a thick black blanket over the city. And blackening his mood even further.

He wished Sarah would confide in him, but he knew her too well. She wouldn't say anything, even if asked, not wanting to worry him. Ever since she was a child, she'd insisted on battling her own dragons, whether real or imaginary. Sarah never asked for anyone's help. So, why wasn't she fighting the dragon now? What had caused her shoulders to slump in defeat when she thought he wasn't looking?

Able knew that if Sarah suspected Roger of embezzlement, she wouldn't think twice about coming to her grandfather. Likewise, if Roger were cheating on her. And her career was thriving. So what was left?

He toyed with the idea of enlisting Whitney's help. After all, there were some things a young woman couldn't talk to her grandfather about, no matter how strong their relationship, and at thirty-seven his second wife was much closer in age to his twenty-eight year old granddaughter. With both her mother and grandmother gone, Sarah was sorely lacking in female confidantes.

But Abel had a bigger problem to contend with at the moment. Sarah's husband had stolen seven million dollars from Montgomery Aeronautics. The proof, in black-and-white, lay spread out across his desk.

He'd been a damn fool. He'd recover from the monetary loss. Seven million dollars was petty cash for a company the size of Montgomery Aeronautics. But could Sarah recover from her husband's betrayal?

Abel shifted his stogy to the side of his mouth, picked up the phone, and pushed the button for the lobby security desk.

"Yes, Mr. Montgomery?"

"Anyone left upstairs, Bill?"

"Just you and Mr. Caine, sir."

Abel placed the receiver back in its cradle and gathered the papers into a file folder. The evidence tucked under his arm, he strode down the hall to confront his grandson-in-law.

Roger stood at the bar in the corner of his office. Unseen, Abel watched from the doorway as Roger grabbed an ice cube with a pair of silver tongs and dropped it into a Baccarat tumbler. With a flourish he added a hefty splash of twelve-year-old Scotch.

“Celebrating?”

Roger spun around. “Abel! You started me. I thought you’d gone hours ago.”

“And I thought you’d be home having dinner with my granddaughter.”

“Soon. I had some work I wanted to finish up before the weekend.”

“Anything to do with this?” Abel thrust the folder at Roger.

“What is it?”

“Why don’t you tell me?”

Roger took a step back as Abel forced the file on him.

“Go on. Take it. Read it carefully. I’d like to hear your thoughts on the subject.”

Roger sat down at his desk and opened the file.

Even in the dimly lit office, Abel could see the man turn gray, sweat breaking out across his brow. Roger’s hand shook as he raised the glass to his mouth and polished off the Scotch in one gulp. “Surely, you don’t believe this!” He laughed nervously. “Someone’s gone to a lot of trouble to make it look like I’ve been stealing from the company. It’s probably that practical joker Danbury in accounting. Never could stand the guy. This time he’s gone too far.”

“This isn’t one of Danbury’s jokes.”

“Christ, Abel! Why would I steal from my own company?”

“*Your* company?”

“You know what I mean.”

“Do I? Perhaps you should explain it to me. Starting with why you stole seven million dollars from *my* company. Why, Roger? How could you do this to me? To Sarah?”

“Yes, Roger, explain it to him.”