

Darry didn't write. Lex didn't call, but Roz's words floated back: "He will because he's only gotten a few kisses. He's interested in more than that from you."

How insulting if that were true. More insulting, though, if it weren't.

As her students exited following the class discussion of the Black Lives Matter protests and some testy arguments, Lex did call. Roz had predicted it, but got the motive wrong. Hearing his voice, Laney forgot all about the interview, and her heart began to beat to his rapid New York-speak. "Been away a lot, didn't forget my promise about the interview. I'm Downtown, between meetings, then heading to the airport. You at the college across the street? Got a minute to say hi?" Or maybe Roz had been right.

He was calling from Goldman Sachs headquarters the pedestrian bridge to Battery Park City. She could see the curving tower from where she sat grading essays. She had been reading Charlie's, trying to imagine the "busted window with a decapitated rat hanging by the tail" and now was wondering where Lex was in the hundreds of supposedly terrorist-attack-proof windows framed in silver.

They would meet in the overpass that connected their work worlds. When she came up the escalator into the enclosed walkway, Lex was on the phone and looking down at the eight lanes of traffic passing below next to the bike path, where a terrorist had mowed down bicyclists. As with the World Trade Center site, it was just part of the surroundings now to the people in business clothes who hurried by balancing coffees, seemingly in animated conversations with themselves until you saw their earpiece.

He wore a dark blue suit in a cut that Brooks Brothers or whoever his tailor was disguised his paunch and emphasized his upper back; Tarzan of the West Side Overpass to Goldman Sachs. “Apologies,” he said as she came up to him. “It’s been crazy. In my meeting, I was recalling that night in the rain. I forgot what you looked like with your hair combed,” he said and took the hair clip out of her bun. As she smoothed the released hair, he looked at her with delight, as if she were a prize. And even though they stood in a steel-and-glass overpass that shuddered and swayed with the pounding and clanging construction, the thousands of cars beneath, the wind, and the hordes of people passing to and fro between soaring concrete and steel emblems of the capital of the earth, she saw him as the most gigantic thing in the world. The soft sleeves covering his arms warmed her neck, her shoulders, the middle of her back, and as he held her with exactly the right amount of pressure, she felt both safe and frightened, admired and desired, not subject to the power around them but only to his. “I can’t make this the kind of kiss I want,” his low voice said in her ear, sending vibrations that gave her goose bumps and made her nipples stick out under the elastic bra. “Guys from the meeting might go by.” His kiss was leisurely in its brevity, soft in its intensity.

“I’ll call, we’ll have dinner in the Hamptons,” he said. She felt, over every inch of her body, his eyes appreciating her as he loosened his hand. He hustled away, and she realized she hadn’t uttered a single word.