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*Blueprints  
for Love*

J.E. D'Angelo

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*Dedication:*

To my father, the greatest storyteller,  
the one to first open my eyes to the arts.

*In appreciation:*

I'd like to thank my friends, whose encouragement and best wishes mean so much.

In particular, a heartfelt thanks to those of you who have endured my endless phone calls, acting as my sounding boards, in order that I may finally achieve the finished product.

Daniela D., Laura M., Linda B., Linda P.

Thank you all for listening, thank you for helping, and most importantly, thank you for your friendship.

I have the love and support of my family, near and far, and for this I consider myself extremely fortunate.

A special thank-you goes to my husband for his support, confidence and unwavering determination to see things through. You gave me the courage to realize my dream. And to my son and daughter, whose pride in me shines in their eyes, only to be returned tenfold... thank you for being the best kids any mother could ever hope for.

## PROLOGUE



“I have one question,” she said, her voice taking on a suggestive tone. “Isn’t this tie choking you yet?”

Alex looked up at her as she reached around his shoulders to undo his tie. He chuckled at her obvious tipsy state, all the while his vital signs skyrocketing at her closeness. “It wasn’t.”

Dispensing with the tie, Kate’s arms continued their journey over his chest, snuggling her face in his neck. Alex caressed her hands as they slid across the front of his shirt, hoping to nonchalantly stop their movement.

Alex watched her, his eyes sparkling, but the feelings she was stirring in him bordered on erotic. “What are you doing?”

Kate started to unbutton his shirt, reveling in the touch of his skin under her fingers.

“What does it look like?” Her lips replaced her fingers, scattering kisses.

Okay, this wasn’t funny anymore. Alex took hold of her

shoulders, lifting her from him. “Kate....”

“I love it when you say my name,” she breathed, unsuccessfully trying to kiss him.

“That’s your name.”

“You never call me ‘Kate’. You call me ‘boss’.

“Because you are my boss, remember?”

“I’m not your boss right now...” she purred, undoing her own buttons, revealing the lacey white bra underneath...

Alex watched her, unable to avert his gaze, and this time when Kate cupped his face in the palms of her hands and pressed her lips to his ... this time she succeeded, she had succeeded in bringing down his defenses.

Alex returned her kiss with the same ardor, the same passion. He knew it was wrong, but he wasn’t in the mood to listen to his brain at that moment.

## CHAPTER ONE



The racket sliced through the air, hurling the small rubber ball across the contained room, but the loud echoing noise paled in comparison to the shriek of displeasure by one of the players.

“That’s two out of three, boss,” Alex boasted with his usual smile.

Kate watched her assistant through narrowed eyes. “Humph! You’ve been practicing behind my back, haven’t you? You know you can be easily replaced,” she threatened.

“Huh! Who else can put up with your mood swings?”

Kate pointed her racket in exaggerated indignation. “Just for that you’re springing for lunch.”

“But I won!”

“Too bad,” Kate sang over her shoulder as she headed for the showers.

A smile spread over Alex Callahan’s handsome face as he

retrieved the rubber ball and placed it and his racket into the black athletic bag near the door at the far end of the enclosed room. Following her to the change rooms, he forced himself not to notice the long slender legs; the swing of her hips as she pushed open the door marked 'Women'.

Kate Wallace was his boss – nothing more. At least that's what he'd been telling himself every morning since deciding to accept the position of 'Assistant to Director' of the prestigious firm of Wallace Architectural.

The hot pulsating water massaged the muscles at the base of his neck. Closing his eyes to the echoing sounds of the water in the small shower stall, inviting its relaxing effect to take over, he allowed his mind to wander.... During this last year, he had come to know his employer quite well. Kate was definitely moody and she almost always got her way. She could be ruthless, but Alex had become accustomed to her, observing her bad points as well as her good, although aside from her looks, those good points were sometimes a little more difficult to find – but they were there, he was certain of that.

The employee gym was situated on the first floor of the building. It was made available to all employees free of charge – a generous gesture on the part of his boss. The announcement of implementation three years ago was tarnished, however, by the stern advice that the facilities were made available because she expected excellence from her employees. Sound body, sound mind. She needed them at their best.

A large rotund man stood at the locker next to Alex's. He was squeezing into a pair of shorts when Alex appeared beside him.



“Hey bud! How’s it going?” The man greeted, slightly out of breath.

Alex stepped into his boxers and reached for his pants. “It’s going Don. How was that visit to the doctor?”

Don closed the locker door and draped a towel around his neck. “Well, not too badly actually,” he shrugged and smiled ruefully. “But as you can see, this is where I’ll be spending my lunch hours from now on – or at least till this ticker starts behaving!”

“That a boy.”

“Yeah, I guess I’ll be dreaming about the Friday night wing binge! Kate’s told everybody in accounting to cut those down to once a month!” he said, shaking his bald head in disappointment.

Alex laughed. “Carrot sticks, Don. Carrot sticks!”

Don had had a mild heart attack a few months previously and was finding it difficult to change his way of life – especially his diet. “Yeah, I guess.... If I want to keep my job anyway.”

“If you want to stay alive, Don! As for the boss ... you know she has to put on that strong front.” Alex’s eyes scanned the room. “This is for your own good, in fact, for all of us.”

Don shrugged. “I suppose. I just hate to admit it, you know?” Don waved his hand and headed for the dreaded treadmill.

Yes, Alex knew what he meant. Kate was tough, but he believed under that thick skin and sharp tongue, she meant well. She did have a heart.

Regardless, Alex admired her. Eight years his junior, Kate’s business savvy matched that of any veteran executive he’d ever encountered. She was intelligent and gutsy. Almost single-handedly, his boss had been able to direct the family business to achieve greater status among competitors, easily meeting and

surpassing goals she'd set for herself. She was a formidable businesswoman.

Her simple beauty, which would turn heads wherever she went, was something on which Alex tried hard not to dwell. Although at times it was quite difficult. Kate was a tad shorter than average in height and slender in form. Her short dark blonde hair was highlighted with lighter shades. She kept it combed in a somewhat unruly fashion around her face, periodically tucking the loose strands behind her ears. Her large hazel eyes were bright and alert. The full lips capable of an enticing smile as well as the angered frown of disapproval were sometimes too inviting for Alex to bear. But Kate was engaged, and although her choice for a husband was one that Alex would not wish upon his worst enemy, he had to remember his place. He was, after all, her assistant; an assistant who would often take the brunt of the problems that arose, both within the office walls and in her personal life, but still, only her assistant. It was best to remember that.

Buttoning the tiny buttons under the tips of his shirt collar, Alex finally sat down in front of her at the small café situated just outside the gym.

"I ordered for you." Kate unnecessarily gestured towards his plate. "What took you so long?"

Alex sighed heavily for emphasis. "We can't all be naturally beautiful."

"No – you can't have another week off this summer," Kate told him, as she searched her salad for a piece of chicken.

Alex shrugged and draped his napkin on his knee. "Can't blame a guy for trying."

Kate looked up, an eyebrow raised, and Alex smiled at her, something that came easily to him.

“Does Tai Lee have the model ready for Gamble and Blaine?” She took a sip of her water and waved a hand toward another of her employees who had just entered the small café, stopping him in his tracks.

“Gary, I need those figures on my desk as soon as possible – like in one hour. How feasible is that?”

Gary scratched his graying head. “Kate, I have Cora working on it. I got everybody working on it,” he explained, extending his arms, “you’ll get it, I promise.”

“I’ll hold you to that.” Kate wasn’t being stern or ill tempered now. She was just matter-of-fact. The accounting problem having been addressed, she returned her questioning look to Alex who answered her promptly as though never having been interrupted.

“Should be ready. I’ll check on it on my way upstairs.”

“It had better be. Have you seen it since he ‘finished’ it? Last week he was missing two stories.”

“Yes, I saw it yesterday. I think you’ll be pleased.”

“Good. That’s an awfully large account. If we’re awarded the contract for this building we’ll stand a better chance of designing the other two in Edmonton and Montreal. And since this was a Kent property, this will mean more jobs being sent our way.”

Kate stood to retrieve another bottle of water from the cooler, and Alex had to raise his voice to be heard. “I’m aware of that,” he called out. “Trust me, it’s great.”

She dropped the required coins by the cash register and returned to her seat. “It’s not your judgment I’m worried about.

Liam Gamble is notoriously picky!”

“Don’t worry, you’re wearing a skirt,” Alex said off-handedly.

Kate looked up sharply. “What’s that got to do with anything?”

“Your legs are all Liam seems to be concerned with when he comes in.” Alex wished he hadn’t made reference to her legs, but it was too late to backtrack now. She’d never let it go.

“What are you babbling about?” Kate’s water bottle was momentarily poised in mid air.

“Come on, don’t tell me you’ve never noticed.”

His boss laughed at this ludicrous suggestion. “No I haven’t, and that’s because you’re imagining things!”

Realizing he still had a job, Alex smiled mischievously and decided to try to peel off one of those thick layers. “No I’m not. Wanna bet he’ll spend more time looking at your legs than the model?”

Kate’s eyes narrowed suspiciously. How did Alex know this? How could he have noticed Liam Gamble’s roaming eyes when she had remained entirely oblivious of this fact – if indeed it was a fact?

“You’re wrong,” Kate dismissed.

“An extra week vacation,” Alex suggested as a wager.

“Forget it!”

“Okay, okay. Next Friday off.”

“All right, you’re on,” she said pointing her finger at him. “But if you’re wrong—”

“—I won’t take Friday off?” Alex said tentatively.

Kate laughed. “What kind of a bet is that? No way! If you’re wrong ... you’ll take the next business trip.”

“Oh great, and where will that be – Siberia?”

“That can be arranged,” she warned.

Alex retrieved the model from the art department and carried it upstairs.

The executive offices of Wallace Architectural were located on the top floor of the eight-story building. Kate had a corner office and two sides of the room were floor-to-ceiling window. Her desk was near the inside wall, giving her full view of downtown Victoria as well as the harbour in the near distance. A large tan suede couch sat closer to the window upon plush cream carpeting, as did a small coffee table and a large round mahogany conference table, four chairs flanking its sides. Kate’s office also provided a private bath, as did Alex’s.

As her assistant, Alex’s substantial sized office was situated next to Kate’s. Aside from the private door that led to the Director’s office, there was a second entrance, which was more or less through Alex’s office. In fact, this was the entrance Kate used; this was the entrance everyone used.

Alex preferred his desk by the large window, a credenza and lateral file of honey coloured wood to one side. The photocopier, drafting table and coffee machine were situated in the area outside the adjoining door giving Kate quick access to all. A partial wall of opaque glass allowed for privacy in his immediate workspace. The two executive secretaries, Connie and Angie, were just outside in the main offices, as were the secretaries of the structural and other architectural engineers on that floor.

Alex made his way through to Kate’s office and placed the model on the table, ready for his boss’s inspection. It was a masterpiece. The multi-leveled office building that they

proposed to build was to be constructed mainly of steel and slab concrete. The structure's highest point was fifteen stories, scaling down three stories at a time on either side. It was to be built on six acres of prime real estate in downtown Vancouver and provided one hundred and thirty-five thousand square feet of office space, including a restaurant, two coffee shops, daycare facilities, and a health spa. Also, there would be three state-of-the-art theatre rooms in which Gamble and Blaine Advertising could demonstrate new campaigns to their clients in style and comfort.

It had been Alex's initial conceptual drawing for the building that had grasped Todd Blaine's attention. And Kate's legs notwithstanding, Alex was confident that both Todd and Liam would be satisfied with their proposal and the detailed three-dimensional model.

Kate inspected the model from every angle. Finally she stood back, arms folded in front of her. A satisfied smile lifted the corners of her mouth. "I have to admit ... you did good."

The inter-office line buzzed, stopping a reply from Alex.

"Yes?"

"Mr. Gamble and Mr. Blaine are here," the secretary announced.

"Show them in, Connie." Kate crossed her fingers. "Here goes."

Alex remained standing by the model while Kate walked towards her office door to greet the two impeccably dressed middle-aged gentlemen who were being escorted into the office. "Liam, Todd, good to see you again."

"Good to see you," Todd Blaine replied, taking her hand.

His partner was quick to join in. Reaching for her hand as

well, Liam nestled it in both of his. “Kate, always a pleasure.”

Kate looked over to Alex, who had arrived at her side. He greeted the two gentlemen, forcing Liam to let go of her hand, and then she gestured for them to precede her to the large table where the model sat. “Please come in.”

Todd walked directly to the model, his approval apparent in his expression. Liam held back, choosing to follow Kate. His eyes, as usual, glued to her legs.

“Alex my boy,” Todd sighed. “This is fabulous.”

“Yes, yes, great design,” added Liam, finally inspecting the model. “I was also impressed with your budgetary cost sheets. I’d like to go over some of these....”

“Of course,” she agreed. “Please sit down, make yourselves comfortable. Connie has just prepared a carafe of coffee and one of tea for you, Todd.”

“You remembered Kate, thank you.” Todd poured himself a cup of tea while Liam was already busy inspecting the elaborately prepared proposal folder that Alex was placing in front of them.

Kate didn’t waste any time. Sitting down next to her assistant, she began her meeting. “Along with Alex’s artistic rendering of the building, this also includes cost breakdowns. Here, on pages five through seven, are projected costs for windows, glazing, building material. Throughout pages eight to ten we list structural costs as well as building efficiency such as air and heat, followed by the design budget and a list of our sub-trades.”

The three discussed each point extensively, reverting to the model when necessary.

“You are predicting caisson footings over the conventional or spread footings,” Todd stated, flipping back a few pages.

“Yes,” answered Alex. “Naturally, sub-soil investigations will have to be completed to determine the bearing capacity of the soil. Although not exactly beachfront, this particular section of Georgia Street is sufficiently close to the Coal Harbour; I’d say the odds are we won’t be hitting clay. Caisson footings and in fact, caisson footings with sheet piling foundations are more common for that area.”

“And sheet piling is a possibility because... ” Liam tested Alex’s knowledge.

“As you are probably aware, caisson footings will usually be used when the soil is unstable, and if there are other structures near the site, the new footings are to be placed lower than the existing ones. With sheet piling, corrugated steel sheets, or ‘soldiers’ as we often call them, are driven into the ground. That basically forms a corrugated box in which the caisson footings are then placed. This box keeps water out in case of underground springs or veins.”

“And as you say, water is a probability.”

“Soil testing will confirm it, but that’s what is generally used for buildings along the waterfront or in close proximity.”

Content with Alex’s conclusion, Liam nodded and proceeded to another point. Alex explained the fabrication of the structure as well as their ideas for the different features to be installed at the different levels of the building if Gamble and Blaine awarded Wallace their contract. Todd and Liam listened attentively. Kate couldn’t help but raise a smug eyebrow towards her assistant. She had yet to see Liam once avert his gaze from the model or the written proposals in front of him. It seemed he had lost the bet!

However, when she excused herself to retrieve the



preliminary structural design from her desk, Liam Gamble's eyes again followed her, focussing intently on her legs. Alex noticed immediately and was only too happy to return the smug look to his boss when Liam did not avert his gaze upon her return. It seemed Alex had been right after all.

"Very impressive," announced Todd as he gathered the proposal and deposited it into his briefcase. "Marvelous design Alex, just marvelous."

Liam stood, confirming the end of the meeting and shook their hands. "Yes, I agree. Kate, Alex, you've outdone yourselves. You know our deadline; we'd like to break ground within the next few weeks – with the emphasis on 'few'. We will require several days to go over your proposal with our team, but I'm sure we'll have an answer for you very soon."

"I'm definitely hoping we can do business," added Todd, as he too shook hands with Kate and Alex.

"We look forward to hearing from you," replied Kate.

Gazing once more towards her legs, Liam said his good-byes and followed his partner out of the office.

Kate was unable to check the grin that spread across her face. "What do you think?"

"By George, I think we've got it!" Alex exclaimed, assuming a British accent, and Kate grinned.

"Did you see their faces when they saw the model?"

"I told you they'd like it."

Kate sighed in contentment. "So you did."

"And what else did I tell you?"

"All right, all right." Kate admitted defeat, but she turned a pensive stare towards the door. "I don't know how I missed that."

“Good thing you don’t notice those things,” Alex said under his breath.

“Hmm?”

“Nothing.” Alex rolled up their copies of drawings and gathered the papers that were scattered across the large table.

Kate glanced at her watch. “I have to meet Dorian on the Bay Street addition. I believe I might be longer than an hour. Can you handle the meeting for the Andrews job?”

“Sure.”

She picked up her briefcase and shoved the necessary files into its folds. “Great. Jerry should be here soon. I asked him to attend the meeting since he’s supposed to be learning the ropes. Hopefully he’ll be more involved once he comes back from this trip...” she shrugged. “He’ll fill me in on the particulars later.”

Her assistant exhaled a slow calming breath. Jerry Kent had no qualifications, nor did it seem to Alex that he had any intention of acquiring any. Jerry’s father was a successful land developer, but from what Kate had mentioned it seemed her betrothed had done nothing to help attain that success. Jerry did not interest himself in the family business. He spent most of his time at the yacht club or the gym. Recently, to Alex’s disconcertment, Jerry’s appearances at Wallace had become more frequent, throwing his weight and walking around as if he owned the company.

But soon he would do just that. Kate had made a deal with Jerry’s father, Gregory Kent of Kent Properties, to merge their two companies. She believed that the merger would be beneficial to Wallace, and she was probably correct. Alex had been told of her decision after the fact, although either way, it was not his place

to comment on this particular subject. He was aware that when Jerry married Kate he would be a permanent fixture at the office. That was Kate's wish. That was a circumstance Alex did not look forward to.

Kate draped her trench coat over her arm and headed for the door. "See you later."

"Sure," Alex said again.