

NATIONAL BEST SELLING AUTHOR
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*Captivated
Hearts*

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“I don’t know who in the hell—”

Jada didn’t get another word out because Damian hauled her to him. His hands threaded through her straight black hair seconds before he kissed her. It was a kiss meant to silence her, of that she was sure, but instead it provoked and intoxicated her. Angling her face, she allowed him to deepen the kiss. He devoured the softness of her lips, then his tongue darted through their moistness to duel with hers.

Jada had no choice but to respond to the passion Damian was rousing in her, especially when his hands roamed downward to cup her buttocks and he shifted her against his hard-on. She was stunned to feel just how hard he’d become from their deep, ravaging kisses and how wet she felt as he repeated the action again and again.

She gasped, groaning as she wound her hands around his neck and returned kiss for heated kiss. And when his lips left hers and moved to the column of her throat, placing hot kisses and gentle nibbles on her neck, quivers of pleasure surged through her. She felt the tips of her breasts harden and a low ache form deep in her belly. She didn’t know what was going on. She only knew she wanted more of it.

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Chapter 1

“WE’RE GETTING A NEW STATION OWNER?” Jada Hart asked as she sat in the Monday morning meeting at San Francisco’s WLB-TV station. She’d come into the office excited to discuss options for her *On the Town with Jada Hart* segment, a showcase for the latest events around the city. But a new owner? What did that mean for her?

Jada had left her family in Dallas, much to her father Duke Hart’s chagrin, and come to San Francisco for her dream job: to be on television. Even though she had a journalism degree from the University of Texas at Austin, the station’s former owner had relegated her to doing fluff pieces. She didn’t let that bring her down though. She’d toiled away at WLB-TV for five years hoping for a break to sit in the morning anchor chair.

“Yes, we are,” station manager Andrew Paxon replied in response to Jada’s question about a new owner. “And he’ll be here soon to meet the entire team.”

Just great, Jada thought. Inevitably, a new owner would want to make changes and put his or her own mark on the station. Once the new owner saw her portfolio, would he or she realize she was capable of more? Everyone in upper management thought Jada was nothing more than a pretty face, so she’d never had even a remote shot at the anchor desk.

Did she play up her looks to get ahead? Yes indeed. She'd learned a long time ago to use her best assets. She had flawless skin, a curvy size-six figure, and long, dark hair thanks to the good genes she inherited from her mother, Abigail Hart. Thinking about Mama made Jada homesick. All she wanted to do right now was get on the phone and call her. And if she wasn't free, then she wanted to talk to her big sister Bree Hart-Wells. A couple of years older, Bree always had a level head and would know what to do in a situation like this.

"I thought WLB-TV was doing much better in the ratings," said Jay Blair, one of the anchors of the morning news program. Jada desperately wished to co-chair it with him.

"Not by much," Andrew commented. "I guess the Barnetts decided to get out while they could. I heard the new owner made them an offer they couldn't refuse."

"And who would be dumb enough to place a bet on a sinking ship?" Jada asked. "I mean, let's be real, folks, there was some real ineptitude going on with upper management. Who's to say the new leadership will be any different?"

Her harsh commentary garnered several stares from her coworkers, including a lethal one from a pair of dark-as-midnight eyes that were glaring from the doorway. They belonged to a man, who, by definition, would be labeled sexy chocolate. He wore a tailored suit that, simply put, fit him like a glove. He topped it off with a lavender and gray silk tie. He wore his hair cut close, had bushy brows, and his goatee was shaped up precisely around thick juicy lips. Jada was sure there had to be an incredible body underneath his suit—one that would make a woman want to take a first and second look. He was devastatingly handsome, but there was also something very intimidating about him if his stance was anything to go by.

"I guess that makes me the man dumb enough to bet on this sinking ship," he replied with a frown.

Jada gulped. *Damn!* She'd just insulted the new owner of WLB-TV.



Damian McKnight stared at the beautiful creature with the opinionated mouth. She was just as gorgeous as the promo photographs had indicated—hell, more so in person. She had deep-brown expressive eyes and a wide, inviting mouth. Then there were the silky strands of black hair that fell straight down her back and her smooth hazelnut skin that glowed from being sun-kissed. She was just the type of woman he needed to avoid—a woman who was aware of her sex appeal and her effect on men; she probably discarded them with equal ease. She spelled trouble with a capital “T”.

“Mr. McKnight.” The station manager fumbled over to greet him. “I’m sorry you had to hear that.” Andrew turned to openly glare at Jada. “But we’re excited to have you here with us. Please,” he said, motioning him over to the table, “allow me to introduce you to the team.”

Damian walked toward the table, but he was unable to take his eyes off the woman with the sassy mouth whose cheeks now flamed red at having been so openly outed. He shook hands with producers, directors, and television personalities until finally he came to *her*. Surprisingly, however, she stood up and faced him head-on as if she wasn’t afraid despite having made a potentially career-ending bluster.

He was unprepared for what he saw when she stood up from her chair. She was nearly as tall as he was at six foot one due to her high heels and alluring legs that just went on and on. At first glance, she appeared slender, but now that he was up close and personal, she was much curvier than he’d thought. Her pert breasts stuck out in the satin button-down shirt she wore with a pencil skirt. On most women the outfit would be professional and demure, but

on her it was a come-on if ever he saw one. It had him imagining all kinds of wicked things.

“Jada Hart.” She stuck out her hand.

He glanced down at the petite fingers on offer and then his eyes traveled up to her face and she raised her brow, daring him not to accept. In the end, he was always professional. He grasped her delicate hand in his and liked it when she gripped back with confidence. He hated a wimpy handshake. “Damian McKnight.”

“Mr. McKnight, it’s a pleasure to meet you.” She didn’t apologize for her earlier gaffe and instead sat back down in her chair.

Damian continued the introductions until he made his way back to the head of the table. “I’m sure you’re all wondering what my plans are,” he began, “so I’ll dive right in. My first objective is the morning news program. Over the next few weeks, I want to see everyone in their natural habitat so I can assess and see for myself what is or is *not* working.” His words were meant to be a warning. For now they could relax, but they shouldn’t rest on their laurels because he would be watching.

“And if it’s not working?” Jada asked boldly. Damian wanted to wipe the smile from that impertinent little mouth of hers. She didn’t know when to let well enough alone.

“Then you’re out.” His eyes didn’t leave Jada’s, and she didn’t look away either. They were having a battle of wills in a stare down. But he always won. Losing was never an option because he wouldn’t allow it.

“Well then.” Andrew coughed. “Why don’t we get back to work and talk about ideas for this week’s segments. Isn’t that right, Jada?” He came behind her chair and patted her shoulder.

Jada shrugged her acquiescence, and she and the new boss lost eye contact. Damian had won that round. He moved to the back of the room to rest against the settee and listen as the groups bounced ideas back and forth.

Some were good, others not so much. He paid attention to who was on the pulse of current news and others who might be coasting. He made a mental note to keep an eye on them.

After the meeting, everyone began to shuffle out of the room as if Damian might change his mind and fire them all. Jada Hart was included in the fray, but he wasn't done with her yet. It was time he let her know who was in charge.

"Ms. Hart, a word please."

She turned at the doorway and glanced at a coworker before slowly easing her way back into the conference room. "Yes?"

"Close the door."

She didn't react immediately. Damian thought she was going to openly defy him, but she did as he asked and closed the door. As she did, Damian got a view of her backside in that skirt, which made a certain member of his anatomy tighten. He willed it down.

Jada walked back toward him.

"Sit."

"If it's all the same to you, I'd rather stand."

Damian felt a frown forming. He didn't like being refused but wasn't going to make a big deal of it. "Suit yourself." He sat down in one of the executive chairs and leaned back to regard her. "You've been at WLB-TV five years, correct?"

She seemed surprised that he knew who she was, and he watched as she stood up straighter. "That's correct."

"I assume you want to go further at this station." Damian rubbed his goatee.

"If you know so much about me, then you know that's true," she responded curtly.

He leaned forward in his chair. She was feisty *and* stubborn. She had to know she was in a precarious position and that antagonizing him wasn't in her best interest, yet

she was egging him on. “Then you know that getting on my good side would be to your advantage. So, let me make a suggestion to you.”

She folded her arms across her chest, causing her breasts to push upward in her button-down shirt and give him a view of her cleavage. “And what might that be?”

He rose to his full six-foot-one height. “Don’t *ever* speak out of turn again when you don’t know the facts. I have big plans for WLB-TV, and if you want to be a part of them, I suggest you learn when and *when not* to give your unsolicited opinion.”

Jada Hart shot daggers at him with her eyes. Damian was certain that if those daggers were real, they would have mortally wounded him. “Thank you for the advice, Mr. McKnight. Am I free to go now?”

She was purposely being overly solicitous, but at least she knew when to keep her mouth shut—otherwise, he might have to shut it for her.

Damian nodded yes in response to her question, and with a quick flip of her hair, Jada walked out the door.

Damian sighed. Despite the bravado he’d shown, his stomach was tight with tension—a tension he recognized as sexual desire. To be brutally honest with himself, he’d felt an urgent need to lift that tight skirt of hers and bury himself deep inside her. That scared him. He’d never crossed the line with an employee, let alone wanted to lose control. Jada Hart was a dangerous woman.

He would need to keep a wide berth from her.



“Is everything OK?” Kyler Barnes, one of the news reporters asked when Jada walked back toward her cubicle.

Jada glanced around and felt as if everyone in the newsroom’s eyes were on her. They’d all just basically seen her get called into the principal’s office and get a talking-to for her insolence. But how was she supposed

to have known that her world was about to change that morning? That Damian McKnight would drift into her life like some sort of cyclone and shift her off her axis?

He'd openly stared at her throughout much of the meeting, making her extremely aware of herself. She'd smoothed her hair, worrying if a strand was out of place. She'd licked her lips that had felt dry all of a sudden. Then she'd shifted uncomfortably in her chair as she'd begun to feel an ache between her thighs. But surely, she couldn't be attracted to him, could she?

Not after he'd just given her a dressing down.

He was arrogant, and she had disliked him instantly. So why was her body reacting to him? Her nipples were puckering in her bra as if they recognized Damian as someone who knew exactly what to do with them—like put them in his mouth and suck on them hard.

Jesus! This is ridiculous. She'd just met the man and already she was fantasizing about having sex with him? She was no prude. Jada liked sex and had no problem finding a man to share her bed with, but none of them had gotten under her skin quite like Damian had done just minutes ago.

"Did you hear me?" Kyler asked as he grabbed Jada's arm and pulled her away from the curious stares of their coworkers. She walked them to a room they used for breakout sessions and closed the door.

"Yes, I heard you." Jada turned her back on the glass window so no one could see her. "And everything is fine."

"It didn't look that way when you came out."

Jada shrugged. "Mr. McKnight let me know who's in charge and that I should mind my p's and q's."

"Figures. Men like Damian McKnight can't take an assertive woman." Kyler laughed and her beautiful, slightly tousled blond locks moved from side to side. Jada envied how effortless Kyler could look without doing much. Although she was only five foot six, Kyler had the

kind of body that designers killed for. She easily fit into the sample sizes that were sometimes sent to the studio. And with Kyler's all-American, clean-faced look, she was easily Jada's competition—but that hadn't stopped the two of them from becoming friends.

Kyler was from a small town in the cornfields of Ohio. She was so homegrown, Jada couldn't help but love her honesty. She even appreciated her naiveté and loved going out on the town with her, if only to see how Kyler reacted. After five years on the San Francisco market, Jada had become somewhat jaded.

"Am I starting to rub off on you? That sounds like something I'd say, not you."

"I'm starting to learn," Kyler said with a sly grin, "that this town and industry aren't as easy as I thought they were going to be."

"I hear you. Sometimes I think about going home to Dallas."

"What stops you?"

"My father didn't raise a quitter. Failure is not an option."

"You're not a failure, Jada. You're amazing. And sooner or later, the powers that be are going to see that."

Jada glanced through the glass doors of the breakout room and saw Damian McKnight walking through the newsroom. As if sensing her watching him, he turned and caught her staring. Immediately, Jada spun around to face Kyler. "I don't know. I didn't do myself any favors by getting on the new boss's bad side."

"You can turn this around. Use that brilliant charm of yours. You're vivacious and a natural flirt. He'll come around."

"You're right. He's a man, isn't he? How can he resist me?"



Jada soon found out that Damian McKnight could resist her just fine. What usually worked on the opposite sex didn't work on him. Over the next few days, he sat down with each member of the staff individually to get to know them. Jada suspected he was doing this to find out their strengths and weaknesses as well as what they thought of their colleagues. But as each day drew to an end, she grew increasingly impatient. Damian had yet to call her into his office.

A couple of nights ago on a dateless evening at home, Jada had researched the man. There was very little online about his personal life. Clearly, he didn't want the press digging into his past, but what Jada did find was quite surprising. Damian McKnight didn't come from money. He was a self-made millionaire who'd grown up on the streets of Los Angeles. Jada surmised that's what probably gave him his edge. He was streetwise until an elderly couple had taken him in at fifteen. They'd nurtured him until he'd gone to college and business school, graduating magna cum laude.

His story was impressive, and Jada couldn't help but admire that he'd pulled himself up by his bootstraps. He'd been lucky when his first venture to turn around a struggling radio station had turned into a goldmine. From there, his interest had branched out from radio into television. It didn't surprise her that he could see a gem in WLB-TV, but that didn't mean he had to snub her. Was he purposely baiting her so that she would confront him and demand an explanation?

By the end of the week, even Kyler commented on the fact that Jada had yet to have a sit-down with him. "You really must have rubbed him the wrong way," Kyler said as they stood in the breakroom on Friday morning. They were both desperate for their morning cup of joe and were in front of the Keurig machine, each waiting for their coffee to brew.

Jada shrugged. “I would have thought after he’d given me the ‘talk’”—she made quotation marks with her hands—“that his almighty greatness would deign to speak with me.” Kyler made a face and shook her head, but Jada was on a roll and not about to stop. “But apparently, I’m at the bottom of the barrel in his book and I’ll just have to accept my fate.”

“Or perhaps you could learn some patience, Ms. Hart,” a masculine voice said from behind her.

Color drained from Jada’s face. Her eyes grew large as she glared at Kyler for allowing her to walk into a minefield. She inhaled sharply and turned around to face her nemesis. “Mr. McKnight.”

Damian wore a navy-blue suit that Jada recognized as designer. Aside from the top-quality material, the single-breasted jacket was superbly tailored. The man looked well-built, and not a wrinkle could be seen on the sleeves across his interminably large shoulders. “Would you care to join me in my office, or would you like to continue to talk about me behind my back? I warn you that you get three strikes, then you’re out.”

Jada grimaced and turned to Kyler. “If you’ll excuse me.” She plastered on a smile and walked toward him. “Lead the way.”

“No. After you. I insist.”

Jada didn’t respond and instead forced herself to put one foot in front of the other and move toward the stairs that led to the second-floor executive offices. Damian remained silent behind her, so she truly had no idea what was in store for her.

When they made it to his office, she walked in and took a seat across from the large glass desk that held nothing but his Surface laptop. Apparently, McKnight didn’t like clutter. She heard the click of the door, indicating the need for privacy. Did this mean he was about to fire her?

His three strikes and you're out comment hadn't been lost on Jada.

Several seconds later, Damian sat across from her. Without looking up, he opened his laptop and clicked several times before training those infinitely dark eyes on her. "Why stay at WLB-TV?"

"Wow! You go right to the point, don't you?"

"I see no reason for beating around the bush."

"I do not accept defeat. What I do have is my will and determination to succeed."

"Ah." He greeted her with a smile, which was quite rewarding because it lit up his entire face and showed off his brilliant white teeth. *He should smile more often instead of glower.* "So, you're hoping that your pretty face will propel you to stardom?"

Jada frowned. "What does my face have to do with anything? I have a degree in journalism from the University of Texas at Austin. Was top of my class and graduated summa cum laude."

"And yet you're doing the entertainment beat."

"I've tried to obtain more substantial pieces, but the prior ownership had a vision of who they wanted in the anchor spot."

"Which yet again begs the question, *why stay?* There're any number of beautiful leading anchors at this station." When she began to balk, Damian held up his hand and continued. "They all have the same, or similar, credentials as yours, Jada. What makes you think you're ever going to get in the anchor chair?"

"I thought in time I could prove I'm capable of more. I don't give up, Mr. McKnight. My daddy taught me that quitters never win, and I've held true to that all my life. I won't stop trying to reach the top of the ladder. So, let me ask you, are you going to help me get there or are you going to hold me back?"

Damian's brow rose. "That depends entirely on you,

Ms. Hart. Do you have any stories that you would like to pitch?”

“P-pitch?”

“Yes, or did you think I called you in to talk about the weather?”

Jada couldn't resist a chuckle. She could do without his sarcasm, but not without the opportunity to get her ideas in front of someone who would finally listen. “Definitely not the weather.” She returned and leaned over the desk until she was mere inches from his face. “Let's talk hard-hitting news.”



An hour later, Damian was in his car and driving to the McKnight Media offices. He'd left the station twenty minutes ago after meeting with Jada. She'd gotten to him. It hadn't been because of her great ideas for an exposé on school lunches or the opioid epidemic. It was because being around her made his system go haywire. He knew that if he had stayed in her company with that provocative perfume she wore, he might just lose his cool.

He'd stayed away from Jada all week because she was the type of woman who made men ogle. For some inexplicable reason, she had become a forbidden fantasy to him. Damian supposed it was because he'd been celibate lately, choosing to work twelve-hour days. Not that it meant he went without entirely. Every now and then, he attended social events that were conducive to meeting women, and he usually found one who was willing to spend a night or two with him for a brief sexual liaison and nothing more. He had no time for emotional entanglements.

Yet, Jada fascinated him. Throughout the week, he'd found himself watching her. She was an incurable flirt—the way she sat on the edge of men's desk showing off those long legs or gave them that winning smile. She practically had every man in the station eating out of her

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palm, but somehow she hadn't translated that into a seat at the table of the morning news program she coveted. She intrigued him.

Rebranding and repositioning the station were going to take time and patience. He shouldn't get embroiled in an affair, especially with a subordinate.

But it didn't mean he didn't want to try.