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Summer in Indianapolis

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CHAPTER ONE: Monument Circle First Glance

The humid embrace of an Indianapolis summer was a familiar sensation to Amelia. It clung to her skin like a second shadow, a constant reminder that the city truly came alive when the temperatures soared. Today, however, felt different. A sense of nervous anticipation buzzed beneath her usual calm, a quiet hum that had nothing to do with the soaring mercury. She clutched the strap of her oversized canvas tote bag, a comfortable weight against her shoulder, as she navigated the familiar sidewalks leading to Monument Circle.

Her new job at the Indiana Historical Society was the source of her jitters, though it was a good kind of nervous. A fresh start after a particularly messy breakup, a chance to immerse herself in something she loved, something tangible and rooted in the past, rather than the fleeting promises of a future that had dissolved like sugar in hot tea. Today was her orientation, and while the building itself wasn't directly on the Circle, the path through it was unavoidable and, in Amelia's opinion, the best way to start any day in the city.

The Soldiers and Sailors Monument rose majestically into the cerulean sky, a stoic sentinel overseeing the bustling activity below. Its limestone gleamed under the relentless sun, a testament to enduring strength, a stark contrast to how Amelia often felt lately. People milled about, tourists craning their necks for photos, office workers grabbing quick lunches, and the occasional street performer adding a quirky soundtrack to the urban symphony. Amelia loved the chaotic energy of it, the way so many disparate lives converged in this one iconic spot.

She found a vacant bench near the base of the monument, shaded by a mature oak tree, and took a moment to breathe. The air, despite the heat, was surprisingly fresh, carrying faint whiffs of car exhaust, blooming petunias, and that indefinable urban scent of concrete and ambition. Amelia pulled out her water bottle and took a long swig, feeling the cool liquid soothe her dry throat. Her phone vibrated in her pocket, a reminder from her new supervisor about the 9 AM start time. She still had fifteen minutes to spare.

As she put her phone away, her gaze drifted across the Circle, taking in the grand architecture of the surrounding buildings. The OneAmerica Tower, the Hilbert Circle Theatre, and the majestic Christ Church Cathedral all stood as silent witnesses to generations of Indianapolis life. It was then that her eyes snagged on him.

He was standing near the fountain on the west side of the Circle, his back mostly to her, talking animatedly into a phone. Even from a distance, Amelia could tell he

possessed a certain easy confidence. His dark hair caught the sunlight in glints of auburn, and his casual button-down shirt, rolled up at the sleeves, hinted at a relaxed professionalism. He gestured occasionally with his free hand, a movement that was both graceful and emphatic.

There was something in his posture, a slight lean in, an engaged tilt of his head, that captivated her. He wasn't just talking; he was listening, truly listening, which was a rare commodity in Amelia's recent experience. A small, involuntary smile played on her lips. It was a fleeting, almost imperceptible moment, a curiosity rather than anything deeper.

Then, as if sensing her gaze, he turned.

His eyes, a startling shade of blue, met hers across the expanse of the Circle. For a fraction of a second, the world seemed to narrow, the cacophony of the city fading into a muted backdrop. A jolt, unexpected and electric, shot through Amelia. It wasn't a sudden epiphany or a love-at-first-sight cliché; it was more like a recognizing, a sense of familiarity with a stranger's gaze.

He offered a quick, almost shy smile, a crinkle at the corners of his eyes that softened his otherwise focused expression. Amelia, caught off guard, felt a blush creep up her neck. She managed a small, equally hesitant smile in return, a silent acknowledgment across the bustling space. It was a moment suspended, brief but potent, before he turned back to his conversation, his voice a low rumble she couldn't quite decipher from her distance.

Amelia's heart gave an extra thump, a lively flutter that surprised her. She chastised herself internally. *Don't be ridiculous*, she thought. *You're starting a new job, not auditioning for a rom-com*. Yet, the image of his blue eyes, the easy smile, lingered. It was a pleasant distraction, a welcome ripple in the calm surface of her carefully constructed new beginning.

She glanced at her watch. Time to go. Her interview had been conducted virtually, so this was her first physical visit to the historical society building. With a final, lingering look towards the spot where he had been standing – he was gone now, vanished into the throngs of people – Amelia pushed herself off the bench. She took a deep breath, the Indianapolis summer air filling her lungs, and started towards her new professional adventure, a faint, unfamiliar warmth blooming in her chest.

The journey from Monument Circle to the Indiana Historical Society building was a short walk, barely ten minutes, but Amelia felt strangely energized. The brief encounter, the flash of a stranger's smile, had unexpectedly lifted her spirits. It was a silly, fleeting moment, she told herself, yet it felt significant, a tiny spark in the often-monotonous rhythm of post-breakup life.

As she entered the impressive limestone building, the cool blast of air conditioning was a welcome respite from the summer heat. The lobby was grand, filled with historical exhibits and the quiet hum of dedicated scholarship. She checked in at the front desk, announced her arrival, and was directed to an office on the third floor. Each step through the hallowed halls felt like a progression, not just into a new building, but into a new chapter of her life.

Her supervisor, Dr. Eleanor Vance, was a woman in her late fifties with kind eyes and a no-nonsense demeanor. Eleanor greeted Amelia with a warm smile and led her to a modest, but functional, office overlooking a quiet side street. "Welcome aboard, Amelia," Eleanor said, gesturing to the desk piled with new employee paperwork. "We're thrilled to have you. Your research on early Indiana architecture is truly impressive."

Amelia felt a surge of pride, her earlier shyness temporarily forgotten. "Thank you, Dr. Vance. I'm excited to get started."

The rest of the morning was a blur of introductions, computer logins, and a detailed overview of her initial project: digitizing a collection of 19th-century photographs of downtown Indianapolis. It was exactly the kind of work Amelia thrived on, a chance to unearth stories hidden in faded images and meticulously catalog them for future generations. Her mind, usually prone to wandering, was completely focused.

Lunchtime arrived sooner than she expected, and Eleanor suggested they eat in the staff lounge. As Amelia unwrapped the sandwich she'd packed, she found herself recounting her morning walk, including the small observation about Monument Circle's vibrancy. She carefully omitted the part about the blue-eyed stranger.

"The Circle is truly the heart of the city," Eleanor mused, taking a sip of her tea. "It's where everyone converges. You see all walks of life there, from the power players in their suits to the tourists with their cameras."

Amelia nodded, a secret smile playing on her lips. "It's beautiful. I'm glad my walk to work goes through it."

The conversation drifted to other topics, work-related discussions about the archives and upcoming exhibitions. Amelia felt herself settling in, the initial anxieties of a new job slowly dissipating. This felt right, a comfortable fit.

Later that afternoon, as Amelia was engrossed in learning the intricacies of the historical society's database, she heard a soft knock on her office door. "Come in," she called, looking up from the computer screen.

Standing in the doorway was a man. Tall, with dark hair that caught the light, and strikingly blue eyes. Her breath hitched. It was him. The stranger from Monument Circle.

He held a stack of files in his hand and offered a friendly, slightly sheepish smile. "Hi, I'm Ben Carter. Dr. Vance asked me to drop these off for you. Said you're working on the downtown Indy photo digitization project?" His voice was a pleasant baritone, smooth and confident.

Amelia felt a flush spread across her cheeks again. *Of course, he works here*, she thought, a mix of embarrassment and exhilarating surprise washing over her. She pushed her chair back, feeling suddenly awkward. "Hi, Ben. Yes, that's me. Amelia Hayes. Nice to meet you."

He walked further into the small office, placing the files on the corner of her desk. As he leaned over, a subtle scent of cedar and something vaguely citrusy wafted towards her, a clean, appealing aroma. "Pleasure's all mine, Amelia," he said, his blue eyes sparkling. "Heard you're the new archivist, fresh from grad school. Welcome to the IHS."

"Thank you," she managed, feeling a silly grin stretch across her face. "It's great to be here."

There was a brief, comfortable silence, filled with the unspoken acknowledgment of their earlier, fleeting encounter. It hung in the air, a delicate thread of connection.

"So," Ben continued, straightening up, "if you have any questions about the database or anything, really, just let me know. I'm usually around. I manage the digital collections, so we'll probably be crossing paths quite a bit."

"That's good to know," Amelia replied, feeling a newfound lightness in her voice. "I'm sure I'll have plenty of questions."

He nodded, a genuine smile still gracing his lips. "Great. Well, I'll let you get back to it. Welcome again, Amelia." He turned to leave, and as he reached the doorway, he paused, looking back at her. "Oh, and by the way," he said, a playful glint in his blue eyes, "I hope your walk through the Circle was pleasant this morning."

Amelia's heart did another little skip. He had noticed her too. A warm wave spread through her, a mixture of validation and pure delight. She met his gaze, a genuine smile now firmly on her face. "It was," she confirmed. "Very pleasant."

He winked, a quick, charming gesture, and then he was gone, leaving Amelia sitting amidst her historical documents, a new, thoroughly modern, and decidedly romantic

possibility fluttering in the quiet stillness of her office. The summer in Indianapolis, she realized, had just gotten a whole lot more interesting.

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CHAPTER TWO: Broad Ripple Breezes

The rest of Amelia's first week at the Indiana Historical Society passed in a pleasant haze of old documents, new databases, and the surprisingly frequent, yet always welcome, appearances of Ben Carter. He was true to his word, often materializing in her doorway with a casual question about her progress or a suggestion for a particularly tricky archival search. Their conversations, initially formal, quickly evolved into something more relaxed, peppered with shared observations about the quirks of the old building and the fascinating snippets of Indianapolis history they unearthed.

Amelia learned that Ben had grown up in the Indianapolis area, attending IUPUI before starting at the IHS five years ago. He was passionate about digital preservation, believing that making history accessible online was crucial for engaging younger generations. His enthusiasm was infectious, and Amelia found herself drawn into his projects, often staying a little later than necessary just to pick his brain about a particularly challenging metadata schema.

By Friday afternoon, the humid embrace of the city was beginning to feel less like a burden and more like a warm invitation. The work week had been productive, fulfilling, and, thanks to Ben, unexpectedly engaging on a personal level. As she packed up her bag, a text from her friend Chloe popped up on her screen.

Chloe: Broad Ripple tonight? Need to celebrate your new job!

Amelia smiled. Chloe, a vivacious graphic designer she'd known since college, was always ready for a good time. Broad Ripple Village, with its eclectic mix of bars, restaurants, and boutiques, was their go-to spot for unwinding. It was a vibrant, pedestrian-friendly neighborhood north of downtown, a stark contrast to the more buttoned-up atmosphere of the historical society.

Amelia: Sounds perfect! What time?

Chloe: 8 PM at The Ripple Inn? We can grab a drink, then figure out dinner.

Amelia: See you there!

Leaving the cool quiet of the IHS, Amelia stepped out into the still-warm evening. The sun was beginning its descent, casting long shadows down the streets and painting the sky in hues of orange and soft purple. She decided to walk home to her apartment in Herron-Morton Place, enjoying the gentle breeze that had finally picked up, a brief reprieve from the day's heat. The historic homes, with their wide porches and intricate

details, always soothed her, each one a silent storyteller of decades past.

Later, after a quick shower and a change into a breezy sundress, Amelia hailed a ride-share to Broad Ripple. The neighborhood was already buzzing when she arrived, the sidewalks teeming with people enjoying the evening. Laughter spilled out of open doorways, music drifted from outdoor patios, and the scent of various cuisines mingled in the air. The canal, which meandered through the village, reflected the twinkling lights of the businesses, adding a touch of serene beauty to the lively scene.

She spotted Chloe immediately, perched on a stool at the bar of The Ripple Inn, her fiery red hair a beacon in the dimly lit space. Chloe's smile was as bright as her hair, and she pulled Amelia into a tight hug.

"Amelia! Look at you, all glowy and professional!" Chloe exclaimed, holding her at arm's length. "How's the new job? Did you find any dusty old secrets yet?"

Amelia laughed, settling onto the stool beside her. "It's great, actually. And yes, a few dusty secrets. Mostly about 19th-century plumbing, but secrets nonetheless." She ordered a glass of rosé, feeling the stress of the week begin to melt away.

"Well, tell me everything," Chloe prompted, taking a sip of her craft beer. "Details, details. Any cute co-workers? Any office drama?"

Amelia hesitated, a faint blush touching her cheeks. "Well," she began, "there is this guy, Ben. He works in digital collections."

Chloe's eyes widened mischievously. "Ooh, a 'this guy.' Spill, girl! What's he like?"

Amelia recounted the Monument Circle encounter, the unexpected reveal at the office, and their subsequent conversations throughout the week. She found herself smiling more as she spoke, the memory of Ben's blue eyes and easy charm warming her from the inside out.

"So, the classic meet-cute *and* he works with you? This is practically a rom-com, Ames!" Chloe declared, a grin splitting her face. "Is he single? Are you going to ask him out?"

"Whoa, slow down!" Amelia protested, laughing. "I have no idea if he's single. And it's only been a week. We're just... colleagues. Friendly colleagues."

"Friendly colleagues who have intense eye contact across Monument Circle," Chloe supplied, wiggling her eyebrows. "I'm telling you, it's a sign. You need to pursue this, Amelia. After your last disaster, you deserve a good one."

Amelia sighed, a mix of apprehension and excitement swirling within her. "I don't know, Chloe. It feels a bit fast. And I just want to focus on work right now."

"That's what you always say," Chloe countered gently. "But you're in a new city, new job, new everything. Why not open yourself up to new possibilities in other areas too?"

Their conversation turned to other topics then – Chloe's latest design project, the upcoming Indy Eleven soccer season, and plans for a joint weekend trip to Brown County. But Ben lingered in Amelia's thoughts, a pleasant undercurrent beneath the lively chatter.

They decided on a small Italian place a few blocks away for dinner. The air was still warm but comfortable as they walked, a light breeze rustling the leaves of the mature trees lining the street. Broad Ripple truly came alive at night, Amelia thought, the glowing signs and vibrant energy painting a picture of carefree summer nights.

As they approached the restaurant, Amelia's eyes scanned the outdoor patio, which was packed with diners. And then, her gaze snagged.

Sitting at a table near the edge of the patio, laughing with a group of friends, was Ben. His dark hair was slightly mussed, and he was wearing a different, darker button-down shirt, sleeves still rolled up. He looked even more relaxed outside of the office, his smile easy and genuine as he gestured while telling a story.

Amelia's heart did that familiar little flutter. "Oh, my God," she whispered to Chloe, tugging her arm.

"What? What is it?" Chloe asked, following Amelia's gaze. Her eyes landed on Ben. "No way. Is that him?"

Amelia nodded, a flush creeping up her neck again. "It is."

"He's even cuter in person," Chloe remarked, a knowing smile playing on her lips. "Come on, let's get a table near them. A little accidental proximity never hurt anyone."

"Chloe, no!" Amelia hissed, mortified. "That's too much. It would be so awkward."

Before Amelia could protest further, Chloe, with a mischievous glint in her eye, spotted an open table a few feet away from Ben's group and started walking towards it. Amelia had no choice but to follow, feeling like she was walking into a very public spotlight.

As they sat down, Ben looked up, his blue eyes sweeping over their table. His smile faltered for a fraction of a second, a flicker of surprise, before it broadened. He pushed

back his chair and made his way over to them.

"Amelia! What a surprise," he said, his voice warm and genuine. "Fancy meeting you here. Enjoying the Broad Ripple scene?"

Amelia felt a blush creep up her neck. "Hi, Ben. Yes, exactly. This is my friend, Chloe."

Chloe, ever the charmer, extended her hand. "Hi, Ben! Nice to finally meet the man of mystery. Amelia's been telling me all about the historical society and... everything." She gave Amelia a pointed look that Amelia desperately hoped Ben didn't catch.

Ben chuckled, shaking Chloe's hand. "Man of mystery, huh? Well, it's a small city, I suppose. And even smaller when you discover everyone eventually ends up in Broad Ripple on a Friday night." He turned back to Amelia, his blue eyes twinkling. "What are you two up to tonight?"

"Just grabbing some dinner," Amelia replied, feeling a little more at ease now that the initial awkwardness had passed. "Enjoying the evening."

"Same here," Ben said, glancing back at his table. "My friends and I were just finishing up. But it was great running into you both. Hopefully, I'll see you around the IHS next week, Amelia."

"Definitely," Amelia said, meeting his gaze. "Have a good night, Ben."

He gave them a quick wave and headed back to his table. Amelia watched him go, a silly smile on her face. Chloe, of course, was practically vibrating with excitement.

"Okay, so 'definitely' is progress!" Chloe whispered excitedly once Ben was out of earshot. "And the way he looked at you! He totally noticed you in the Circle, you know. He mentioned it on purpose."

Amelia rolled her eyes, but she couldn't suppress the warmth blooming in her chest. "He was just being friendly, Chloe. We're colleagues."

"Colleagues don't get that twinkle in their eye," Chloe countered, shaking her head. "Trust me. I've seen enough bad dates and awkward encounters to know when there's something there." She paused, then added, "Besides, you're smiling like you just found the last slice of your favorite pizza, so don't even try to deny it."

They ordered their food, but Amelia found her gaze drifting occasionally towards Ben's table. He was still laughing with his friends, completely at ease, and every now and then, he would glance over, catching her eye and offering a quick, friendly smile. Each time, Amelia felt that familiar flutter, a delightful, almost giddy sensation.

After dinner, as they walked back towards the main street to find a ride home, a light, fragrant breeze carried the scent of night-blooming jasmine and warm asphalt. Broad Ripple was still alive, the energy infectious. Amelia felt a lightness in her step, a sense of anticipation that had been missing from her life for too long.

"So, what's the verdict, Ames?" Chloe asked, nudging her gently. "Are you going to let a little Broad Ripple breeze blow some romance into your life?"

Amelia laughed, a genuine, joyful sound. She wasn't ready to admit to Chloe, or even fully to herself, how much the idea appealed to her. But as she thought about Ben, about his easy smile and those striking blue eyes, she felt a quiet hope begin to unfurl within her. The summer in Indianapolis was just beginning, and already, it was proving to be full of unexpected delights. And perhaps, just perhaps, those Broad Ripple breezes were carrying more than just the scent of jasmine. They might just be carrying the subtle promise of something more.

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