

THE LAST MILE by Kat Martin

EXCERPT

Twenty minutes later, after weaving their way through traffic, they pulled up in front of Abby's borrowed apartment.

"I won't be long," she said and cracked open her door.

Gage caught her arm. "Now that the papers are signed, I'm in charge, remember?"

"Yes, but—"

"The problem that existed last night hasn't changed. Just because you put the gold back in the bank doesn't mean you're safe. There's been at least one attempt on your life, and if the guy at the museum was the same man, he might be willing to take you by force, coerce you into giving him the map."

A thread of unease slid through her. "So what would you suggest? I have work to do, same as you."

"If you want this venture to succeed, at this point, you have two options—I can put a guard on your door 24/7 or you can stay at my place."

"You can't be serious." *Superman, ha!* The man was dictatorial and overbearing. How was she going to put up with him for what could end up being weeks?

But what if he was right? Was it possible the man who'd attacked her knew where she was staying? Had he followed her to the museum last night? Would he come after her again, try to force her to give him the map?

"My apartment building's extremely secure," Gage was saying. "It's big enough that you'll have all the privacy you need, and it won't be for long. As soon as everything's ready, we'll be leaving for Arizona."

The chunk of gold was back in the bank, the map in the safe in Gage's office, but she and Gage were the only ones who knew that. Abby looked into Gage's stern features and knew he wasn't going to back down.

“So what’s it going to be?” he said.

“If you hire a guard, I’ll be paying for half of it. I’ll stay at your place. And you’d better remember—I still have my gun.”

Gage grinned, then threw back his head and laughed.

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Gage wasn’t laughing when Abby opened the door to the apartment and the interior looked as if a bomb had gone off.

“Oh, my God!”

Easing her behind him, he walked into the living room. The sofa was overturned, the cushions sliced open, pictures had been jerked down from the walls, the backs ripped off. Kitchen drawers had been pulled out and dumped, cabinets opened, the contents spilled on the floor.

“Stay right here.” For once, Abby didn’t argue. She was clearly in shock at the nightmare she had stumbled into.

Gage checked the rooms, making sure the intruder or intruders were gone, then returned to the living room. “Take a look around, see if anything’s missing.”

Big golden eyes flashed to his face. “You think it was him? The guy who broke in before?”

“What do you think?”

She huffed out a breath at the sarcasm in his voice. “Well, hell’s bells. Tammy’s going to kill me.”

Amusement eased some of his tension. “Don’t worry, we’ll clean everything up before she comes back.”

Gage followed Abby on a tour of the apartment, including the bedroom and bathroom, both of which had been very thoroughly searched.

Abby sighed as they returned to the living room. “It’s hard to tell for sure, but I don’t think anything’s missing.”

“He was looking for the map, same as before. Does he also know about the gold?”

“I don’t know. They were both in the old wooden box, which was sealed when I got it. But the map was mentioned in the will. King’s attorney called everyone together for the reading, anyone who

received a gift. That included several museums, who had representatives there. So there are a number of people who know about it.”

“You need to make a list—anyone who was at the reading, or might know about your grandfather’s bequest.”

She glanced around and nodded dully. “Okay.”

“In the meantime, I’m bringing in reinforcements. We need to get this place cleaned up.” Taking out his cell, Gage phoned Maggie. Half an hour later, a cleaning crew arrived and Abby put them to work alongside her.

Gage pitched in and they made fairly quick progress. There were items that needed replacing. After an explanatory phone call to her friend and a lengthy apology, Abby left a check for repairs on the counter.

Though the afternoon was shot to hell, Gage couldn’t help feeling relieved that he had insisted on coming with her. Or that Abby would be staying at his place tonight.

Whoever was after the map wasn’t giving up. Gage needed to look at Abby’s suspect list. He wanted to find this guy before they set off on what was already certain to be a dangerous journey.

By late afternoon, the work was finally completed, the cleaning crew gone, the apartment restored as much as possible. Abby had packed several suitcases, casual clothes as well as gear suitable for the trip into the desert. Anything else could be purchased once they got to Arizona.

“You ready?” Gage asked. The suitcases were loaded. The digital cards had been stolen from her cameras but fortunately she had extras and the cameras hadn’t been destroyed.

“I’m ready.” She looked tired for the first time since he’d met her, her expression glum. She put her hand on his arm, as if to steady herself.

Gage caught her shoulders. “Everything’s going to be all right. We still have what we need to find the Devil’s Gold, okay?”

Abby slowly nodded. “You’re right. I just...I didn’t expect anything like this to happen.”

“It’s been a long day. Let’s go home.”

Abby looked up at him. “I don’t really have a home anymore so I guess your place will do.”

She looked so forlorn, Gage leaned down and kissed her forehead. It was a very un-Gage-like thing to do.

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