

Chapter One

“Hey, Meghan!”

Meghan McCafferty paused in the hall just outside the front door to her ~~apartmt~~ apartment, tension quirking between her shoulders. She didn’t let the tension-stress show ~~she never let the tension show~~, which meant that someday her head was going to explode and she’d have no one to blame but herself. Danny always said he’d appreciate a few minutes’ little warning before her top blew so he could be-out stay out of range. Danny thought he was a funny man.

A sultry voice drawled behind her. “Hey, Meghan!”

Megan Meghan finished locking the door, then turned to her neighbor, 3-B, who poised – or posed, depending on how cynical you were she was feeling, and Meghan was feeling pretty cynical – on tall mules on spiked stilettos and, a silk wrap in place by a carelessly tied belt. 3-B was ecumenical in infamous for bestowing her favors, from what Megan had observed, and was impervious immune to subtle hints that other people wore actual clothing when interacting with their neighbors. Although Meghan supposed if she possessed 3-B’s attributes, she herself might be more relaxed about keeping covered. Fortunately, 3-B conducted the bulk of her affairs elsewhere, or she would have been too great a security risk and Meghan would have had to get rid of her.

“How are you doing?” 3-B asked, her broad smile showing even rows of showing off dazzling white teeth.

3-B had taken over the apartment from its former resident and had never changed the name in the slot on the mailbox that corresponded with her apartment it. This strategy would have made more sense in a rent-controlled building where it might have saved her a fortune in rent

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Comment [ER1]: For a first chapter, it is important to set the scene and draw the reader in, which allows them to visualize it. I suggest setting the stage of the scene first (setting/person/etc) prior to a greeting line by a secondary character.

Comment [ER2]: I wasn’t sure what quirkling meant in regard to body movement. Perhaps something like “bunching” or “knotting.”

Comment [ER3]: Redundant word. Let’s try “stress” or something similar.

Comment [ER4]: I would be curious as a reader to know who Danny is right up front. Male friend, boyfriend, etc. Or, make it clear like “Danny always teased her during their pillow talk about...” so the reader can figure that part out.

Comment [ER5]: Here we can insert the greeting from the neighbor now that the stage is set. I chose “sultry and drawled” based on how she is portrayed in this whole scene, yet you know your characters better. Choose a tone of voice that matches her persona.

Comment [ER6]: This confused me a few times, thinking you referred to an animal. I would go with “heels”

Comment [ER7]: Love the concept you are going for here with this paragraph. It is a very nice visual overall of the neighbor. I find it is a bit too hard to read and slows down the flow of being pulled into the scene. I gave some suggestions for rewording the same idea, yet the goal is smooth reading.

Comment [ER8]: Most readers won’t know what this word means. I myself had to look it up for a reminder.

Comment [ER9]: No comma

Comment [ER10]: Extra wordiness not needed. Just make the statement of what 3B is known for and move on. Readers will take it at face value.

Comment [ER11]: Another word that may throw readers. Try to stick with common simple language.

Comment [ER12]: This comes to the end of a long background on 3B. My question is, how essential is this character or will she be in future scenes? If not at all, consider shortening your description of her beyond a quick glimpse into her physical appearance.

Comment [ER13]: Is there a purpose for 3B in this scene at all? If so, it should be for more than just a general inquiry. Let’s be sure each line of dialogue has a purpose and carries its own weight. She should say something here that is relevant to the plot or Meghan’s characterization.

increases, but this wasn't one of those buildings. Danny called 3-B Marilyn Monroe, whom she resembled; blonde and breathy, somewhat skinnier than the original model in congruence with current standards of beauty, which diverged wildly with what was general reality. ~~As did so~~

Comment [ER14]: Unnecessary wordiness.

~~many things.~~ Meghan thought of her as 3-B, even though she'd read the security brief her investigator had supplied after the apartment had changed hands. She was clear; that was all Meghan needed to know. Her name wasn't useful for Meghan to remember, so she didn't.

Comment [ER15]: Here we have a nice hint of suspense making the reader wonder what's happening or what this is all about. I'd like to know more.

"I'm fine," Meghan said automatically. When she was younger she used to think the expression of friendly interest was just that, ~~friendly interest~~, but she hadn't been that young in a long time. She had learned to make the assumption that everyone wanted something from her and the faster she found out what it was, the sooner she could move along. She glanced at her

Comment [ER16]: See my comment below about why is it Meghan wouldn't remember her name.

Comment [ER17]: Let's make the dialogue more interesting or engaging in this scene if their interaction is necessary. Maybe sarcasm with "terrific, I was about to bust out the tequila and play a game of Twister." Or right to the point "No time to talk, I'm late" and then inner dialogue about why she's avoiding the girl as it is written.

watch. ~~"Something I can do for you?"~~

Comment [ER18]: If you say that the sooner she finds out what a person wants, the better, why not have her ask?

3-B clattered ~~across the hallway to get a little nearer to Meghan~~ ~~her way, closing them in.~~ Meghan stepped back, ~~verified lines of~~ ~~while check for ways to~~ escape. It would take her too long to unlock the apartment door ~~but there were other options, just in case~~ ~~if~~ 3-B had a Glock concealed up her butt. It was possible. *Anything* was possible. ~~What should she do?~~

Comment [ER19]: Not sure what this means

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Basic security, because even though 3-B had been cleared, Meghan had no way of knowing if she'd been suborned yesterday or in any of the twenty-three days since the last security check.

It was possible, ~~Anything was possible,~~ although ~~not, in in~~ Meghan's experience, usually ~~not~~ in a good way.

Comment [ER20]: comma

"I was ~~wondering...~~" ~~here~~ 3-B gave another winning smile, which would have been more effective if Meghan were susceptible to feminine wiles.

Comment [ER21]: Use ellipsis here (3 dots) to indicate her sentence was not complete or trailed off

"~~Yes?~~ ~~I really do have to get going.~~" More impatient now, with another pointed look at her watch, ~~maintaining~~ ~~Meghan maintained~~ awareness of her environment. ~~It didn't take long to~~

Comment [ER22]: I made some text edit suggestions just to show you how the paragraph would make more sense and flow smoother. The dialogue is short and choppy and could use more substance to interest the reader up front. You can also use dialogue to increase the suspense.

learn how to adapt her daily living. She varied her routine, ~~she~~ randomly alternated modes of transportation, ~~she and~~ constantly swept the horizon for trouble, ~~but~~. She quickly discovered that there was a limit to how easily ~~you could~~she could outwit a neighbor ~~who'd been lying in wait for stalking you.~~her.

“You know I’m a dancer.” 3-B straightened her shoulders, thrusting twin cones of silicone in Meghan’s direction. If Meghan remembered the briefing correctly, ~~the dancing 3-B did was of the mostly naked variety~~her neighbor was a stripper, not exactly glamorous dancing. Not that ~~she~~Meghan judged. Life was what it was and you did what you had to do to survive it, and as long as ~~you didn’t wake Meghan~~she didn’t get woken up in the middle of the night, ~~she didn’t care how you went about it.~~it wasn’t her business.

“I got laid off.” Here the winning smile dimmed ~~and after a brief struggle disappeared,~~ and 3-B’s lower lip started to tremble.

“That sucks,” Meghan said. “I’m sorry to hear that.”

She was not without compassion. She knew what it was like to be laid off. In fact, that had been one of many painful learning experiences that had proved so valuable to her. Meghan never forgot a lesson she learned the hard way. She was more than willing to learn lessons the easy way, but for some reason ~~that was never how they presented themselves~~they never presented themselves that way.

“So, anyway –”

“I’ll let you know if I hear of any openings,” Meghan said, edging past ~~3-B and~~while watching the woman’s hopeful expression fall into dismay. But Meghan was no longer responsible for saving other people, ~~and so~~ she turned away.

Her neighbor continued with, “I was thinking –”

Comment [ER23]: Choose any comment you prefer, but “lying in wait for you” is a bit choppy and wordy. You can summarize this with one word.

Comment [ER24]: I am wondering at this point what the crime/issue/or deal is with the neighbor.

Comment [ER25]: Again, a little long, but funny. You could simply say “fake perky boobs” or something similar.

Comment [ER26]: A nice variety from the repetitive 3B. I am wondering, why would Meghan not know her name if she is so worried about her or afraid of her? If she sat through an entire briefing about this woman, wouldn’t she remember her name?

Comment [ER27]: If she is compassionate, maybe she should demonstrate that in her line above? I made a suggestion, but you get the idea.

Comment [ER28]: This is all nicely worded. I felt it could flow a little better be moving around the words.

Comment [ER29]: This could be a good opportunity to enter in an example of a hard lesson she learned if this is part of her big-picture backdrop.

Comment [ER30]: I am not sure who is speaking here. Enter a tag.

“I’m really late. Have a great day.” She pushed ~~past 3-B and hit~~ her way to the stairs.

3-B leaned over the rail and yelled, “I was just wondering if you could talk to the landlord!”

Meghan froze midstep, ~~spine turning. Her spine turned~~ to ice. Slowly she ~~turned~~ pivoted on the stairs and met 3-B’s wide gaze with her one good eye (~~the fact~~ that she had only one good eye was the result of one of those many life lessons). “What ~~do you mean~~?”

“I heard you know the landlord,” 3-B said hurriedly, ~~straightening up and~~ pulling her robe tighter around her, as if ~~she’d realized she’d just~~ realizing she said something really

~~wrong~~ scandalous and was prepared to ~~turn tail and run~~ if it looked like there’d be trouble over it.

Her bewildered expression would have amused Meghan if ~~she’d been capable of being amused at the moment~~ she was in a better mood at the moment. ~~A smirk would leave~~ 3-B ~~would be~~ asking

herself what she’d done wrong, frantically reviewing her words ~~for a mistake with no clue~~

~~though she had no way of knowing why her request~~ what bothered Meghan so much.

~~Meghan calmed her voice despite knuckles whitening from gripping the rail. Forcing her~~

~~voice to sound calm even as her knuckles whitened as she clutched the rail, Meghan asked,~~

“Where did you hear that?” ~~she asked.~~

3-B opened her mouth, ~~then~~ shut it, then swallowed hard and said ~~in a breathless voice~~, “I

don’t remember ~~,”~~ ~~in her ditziest, most breathless voice and~~ ~~She then~~ retreated quickly to her

apartment, slamming the door shut. Meghan fancied she could hear the bolts sliding ~~all the way~~

~~inside her own apartment even from here~~ ~~home from here~~. She stared up at the closed door for a

long moment.

Someone had been whispering stories about her. Meghan didn’t like that, though she

understood ~~the reality that~~ she couldn’t control it. ~~Her heart started thundering out of her chest~~

~~just thinking about it. What did this mean? Anxiety kept her feet glued in the hallway despite an~~

Comment [ER31]: Maybe this needs a question mark if it is a question.

Comment [ER32]: Try to avoid redundant words in the same sentence, even if they are used differently.

Comment [ER33]: I suggest putting a little more substance or purpose into your characters’ dialogue.

Comment [ER34]: No comma

Comment [ER35]: I like your idea here, yet I feel this is a bit of a mouthful. Can we simplify this sentence so it isn’t so long? Remember, clarity is key. Let’s just end this with a strong verb “run” which gives a powerful enough image.

Comment [ER36]: A bit more simplification of your words here will help the paragraph float through the readers mind and keep the pace moving naturally.

Comment [ER37]: It would make more sense to describe her voice before she says the comment, not after. Here you are saying she used a breathless voice to retreat, yet when she retreats, she’s actually moving, not speaking. Perhaps reorder the sentence. Also, ditzzy and breathless give two different personality images. Perhaps just pick one?

Comment [ER38]: Not sure what this means.

Comment [ER39]: Before, she was feeling unsafe, anxious, and eager to get out of there. Why would she keep standing there for so long? I would think she’d flee as fast as she could, thinking her thoughts along the way.

urge to flee. She focused her thoughts, reminding herself that ~~What she had to do was make sure~~
~~it didn't pose a threat to her.~~ she was in charge of her own safety. But oh this woman, 3B, this
shell of a mysterious person who could wipe her out with one spike of a stiletto in her eye, oh
this woman.

Comment [ER40]: Is this the end of the chapter? Or just where the sample cuts off? If it's the end, consider stopping with more of a suspenseful line that also highlights Meghan's emotions internally or poses a question. End it with a bang!

Overall, with some revisions, this can be made into an alluring first chapter. If you are going for setting a suspenseful scene, consider showing your main character as more nervous, skittish, or paranoid such as sweat running down her back, checking over her shoulder, jumping at every little noise, etc. This will prompt the reader to worry for her and wonder what has happened to her. You can make this intro more about Meghan's feelings, backstory, trauma or struggles right up front, with less focus on the neighbor if she is not a major part of the story