

Chapter One

It never fails.

Katherine Jensen grabbed the nail polish bottle, gave the lid a half twist, hobbled the six steps across the living room to the foyer table, and grabbed the phone on the sixth ring. "Hello!"

"Mercy, Kathy, what's wrong with you?"

Katherine smiled. "The cleaners called about fifteen minutes ago about William's suits and I forgot to bring the phone back to the living room with me."

"Seriously? You have a huge anniversary weekend to get ready for and you're lounging around the living room from hell?"

"Yeah, Abby, I'm all lady-of-leisure-ing it around here." Katherine shuffled back across the floor on her heels, with her toes and cotton balls held rigidly away from the snow-white carpet. She shoved the receiver to her ear and held it steady with her shoulder. "I'm painting my toenails."

"In the living room?" Her sister's voice rose an octave and came out as a squeak. "Are you crazy? William will have kittens."

Her husband was anal about his white living room, said it would teach their children discipline. It only taught them to stay out of Daddy's white room.

"I'm being careful. And don't you dare tell Crysta. It's just easier down here with the ottoman. I'm nowhere near as limber as she is, so I have an acceptable excuse." The day before she'd stood in the doorway of her fifteen-year-old daughter's room watching her contort her body into some weird yoga position and thinking, Baby girl, you're sure going to miss those knees when they're gone.

"Are you packed?"

"Yep, all ready. I bought a new negligee."

"Good for you. Maybe it'll be all you have to take."

Katherine laughed. Yeah, right. She couldn't remember the last time she and William had spent any time at all together, much less took time out of his busy schedule for sex, in or out of nightclothes. They barely had a conversation that lasted longer than ninety seconds, for that matter, and when they did, it rarely did more than cover the essentials.

"I paid the water bill."

"Good girl. I won't be home for dinner tomorrow night."

"But Will has his exhibit in the Science Fair Thursday. He won first place."

“Can't make it.”

“Of course not.”

“Don't start, Katherine. He'll be fine with you there.”

“He usually is.”

“I said don't start.”

That's why all of this was so hard to understand. When the flowers arrived that afternoon, it stunned her like few things ever had. William seldom remembered anything having to do with her or the family, but to remember their anniversary---well, yeah, stunned about summed up her reaction. But she was completely blown away when the concierge from the Greenville Hilton called to confirm reservations for the weekend. They hadn't been back since their honeymoon eighteen years ago. It was a sweet touch to choose that hotel to celebrate. She wondered what had gotten into him. William was a lot of things. Sweet was not one of them.

She shook herself out of her musings, remembering she had her sister hanging on the line. “I sure do appreciate you, Abby. I know it's short notice to ask you to keep the kids. Crysta shouldn't have to give up her weekend at the lake with Maria's family. Her plans were made long before ours.”

“Oh, hush. I'll see you in an hour, so hurry and get out of that room.”

Katherine checked the lid on the nail polish bottle again and sat back on the white couch, her feet on the white ottoman in the forbidden white room. The kids were all set to go to Aunt Abby's and Uncle Trainer's for the weekend, and in a few hours, she would meet William at the hotel—if only to figure out what was up with him.

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Katherine flipped the turn signal and waited for the bread truck, Prius, and utility truck to pass before pulling into the parking garage of the hotel. She pressed the button and lowered the window to take the ticket from the attendant.

“Enjoy your stay.”

Unable to keep the smile from her face, she beamed at him in his little glass cubicle. “That's the plan. I'm meeting my husband for the weekend. It's our eighteenth wedding anniversary.”

Katherine knew he didn't care, but he smiled and wished them well. She hated feeling suspicious and excited all at the same time.

She spun the Jag into a corner space near a huge round pole just the way William had instructed when they got the car. No one can hit you if you are blocked between a wall and a weight-bearing pillar.

Checking her makeup one last time in the rear-view mirror--more for nerves than the suspicion it had melted off her face in the last five minutes--she reached

for her heels and traded them for the flip flops she'd wore while driving, smoothed imaginary wrinkles from her dress and got out of the car.

A shrill giggle from the other side of the parking deck set her teeth on edge.

"Stop it, darling. Someone will see."

Guess someone is getting an early start on their weekend. Katherine smiled as she hit the trunk release button on her keychain and slung her purse over her shoulder, before she reached in for her overnight bag. Then she heard the buzzing. What is that?

"Be quiet. She'll hear you." A man's distorted voice echoed against the hollow concrete structure as he barked out the order.

Katherine shuddered at the sound of it as she reached in her purse and extracted her cell. Shoot. No wonder she'd not heard from William all day. She still had it set to vibrate from her visit to the library yesterday. Boy, is he going to be surprised.

"Hello?"

"Katherine, good, you're home." William's voice sounded strange, echoing. "We have an emergency with the Collins account and I have to go to Chicago for a month."

"Chicago?" Her heart plunged as she sat on the lip of the trunk with no concern for her designer skirt. So much for their special weekend. "A month?"

"Yeah, I have to fly out tonight."

That giggle again. Katherine took a step forward and peeked around the pillar. Freezing to the spot, an icy bucket of mixed emotions washed over her-- shock, anger, fear, disappointment, and so many more.

The giggler pulled William's tie loose and ran her tongue up his neck to his jaw. He pressed the mute button and pushed her away, chuckling, when she aimed it toward his mouth. "Do you want her to hear you? One minute more and I'll take care of everything that ails you." He uncovered the receiver.

"Katherine, are you there? Listen, don't pout. I'll make it up to you. I promise."

"Tonight?" Katherine shoved her voice, empty and flat, from her throat.

"Not tonight, you twit. I told you I have to fly out tonight. Aren't you listening to me? I'm at the airport. They're calling our flight now. I've got to go. "

As she pulled the phone away from her ear, she turned the volume as low as she could and still hear but quietly enough that William couldn't. She aimed the phone at them and hit the record button. "You're at the airport right now, William?"

"Isn't that just what I said? I know it's last minute, but you're not new to this. You understand how these things are. There's nothing I can do about it, and you getting all bitchy on me won't help, so don't start. It'll be late when we land, so

I'll call you sometime tomorrow. Remember to charge your phone so you won't miss my call."

"We?"

He blew out a long-suffering sigh followed by a loud snort. "Oh my god, Katherine. There will be other passengers with me. Do you seriously think I'm flying the plane myself? What's wrong with you? This is my job, and my job is taking me to Chicago for four weeks, so get over it and stop giving me grief. One of us has to work, and if you're not going to, that leaves me. Shit. Thanks, Katherine, now I have to run. Thanks a lot. "

Stung, she watched her husband tap the touch screen disconnecting them, and shove the phone in his back pocket.

"Now, what were you saying?" With a bark of laughter and a growl, he backed the woman against the concrete wall, pulled her skirt up over her hips, and ground his lower body into hers as he crushed scorching kisses to her mouth. Katherine hit the zoom button and lifted her phone straight out in front of her as the minutes of filmed footage piled into her cell.

"Not here. Let's check in and I'll screw you like there's no tomorrow."

"You always do."

Chloe? Katherine couldn't breathe watching him grope his assistant. He's having an affair with Chloe? Did Michael know? What excuse did she give him for leaving?

Chloe pulled her skirt down and went up the steps into the lift area ahead of William who slid his hand up her skirt, eliciting yet another shrill giggle as they disappeared through the door.

Swallowing hard, Katherine focused on breathing, pushing her suitcase back into the trunk, and closing the lid. She slipped off her heels and walked barefoot to the driver's side of the car. The reflection in the car door window looked like her. Perfectly coiffed, ready for a weekend away with her husband. Her husband. She unlocked the door and climbed in. Leaving the recording function activated, she dialed Chloe's home number.

Michael answered on the first ring.

"May I speak to Chloe Reardon, please?" Katherine asked with someone else's voice.

"I'm sorry, no. She's away at a spa retreat for the next three weeks with some of her friends. Can I help you?"

"Oh shoot. I was really hoping she hadn't left yet. This is Tammy Greenwald. Our kids are in daycare together. I'm one of the friends she's supposed to be meeting, but I'm running so late. I can't for the life of me find the destination particulars. Do you have the spa number?"

She heard Tod and Trish clamoring for Daddy's attention, their whining clear the background under the sound of papers shuffling. "Yes, I do, Tammy. Hold on a sec." She almost chuckled out loud, but he was in for heartache, too. He had no idea who Tammy Greenwald was—because Tammy Greenwald didn't exist. Still as he rattled off the number, Katherine went lightheaded as the last of the blood drained from her heart.

William's number.

"So, what's your husband doing with your children these next three weeks? I'm a little out of my league here with our twins and the baby."

"He's not doing anything with my kids, Michael." Katherine raised her chin, climbed in the car, and slammed the door. She stared into her cold, hard, lifeless eyes in the rear-view mirror. "I'm getting a divorce."

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