

# A Heart in Turmoil

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## CHAPTER ONE - The Dutiful Wife

The raindrops tapped against the steamed-up window panes. Kristen's eyes were drawn to the piles of returned books waiting to be put back on their shelves. She grabbed the hair bobble from around her wrist, gathering her thick brunette curls into a ponytail at the back of her head. Rising from her chair at the library counter, she caught sight of her reflection in the window pane and paused briefly. Kristen noted how her favourite oversized beige blouse pooled at the waistband of her ankle-length black floral skirt. She smoothed her hands softly over her tummy, then glided them to her sides and over her hips, taking a moment to appreciate the familiar comfort of her clothes. She glanced closer at the lines on her face, noting the slight creases beginning to form at the edges of her jade green eyes.

Aside from this, her olive-toned skin was flawless, and she looked youthful for her age. Kristen's thoughts drifted back to when she first met Corbyn, how they had been each other's world. They had met at university—he was studying Politics at Eton, while she attended UCL for Classical Literature. Her mind drifted to their wedding eight years ago, recalling the joy and excitement of that day. But as she stood there in the quiet library, she couldn't help

but notice how much their relationship had changed. The spark that once defined their bond seemed distant now, replaced by an unsettling sense of routine.

With a small sigh, Kristen snapped out of her trance-like state and walked over to the trolley of returned books. She took the first stack of about ten books to the relevant section of the library. Today seemed to be a quiet day for a Wednesday. Two small groups of students were studying with open textbooks at the larger workstations near the back of the library. Kristen began placing the books neatly back into their coded sections.

She soon finished with the science section and made her way back to the trolley to collect the books for the next section. Glancing at her wristwatch, she noticed it was slowly approaching noon. Kaitlyn would be coming in to work within the next thirty minutes. Kaitlyn, a psychology student, had morning classes on Wednesdays and worked in the library in the afternoons, as well as on Thursday and Friday afternoons. Kristen and Kaitlyn also both attended the weekly book club run by Dion Sharp, the library manager, which took place in the library on Thursday evenings.

Feeling a slight pang of hunger in her stomach, Kristen realised she was ready for her lunch break. The two groups of students who had

been studying were now beginning to pack away their stationery and return their books to the shelves, signalling that they were ready for a break too. Suddenly the automatic doors to the campus library whirred open, and a rather rain-drenched Kaitlyn came clambering in. Beads of rain slid off her red macintosh coat, which she quickly shook off. The cold bite in the air was evident in the slight chattering of her teeth, and her bright auburn hair was tinged darker by the rain clinging to her slightly messy, thrown-up bun. “So sorry! Class ran over—you know how Professor Parker likes to talk,” she explained breathlessly, smiling at Kristen. “Just let me put this stuff in the back office and I’ll come cover your break.” With that, she folded the dripping macintosh over one arm, clung to the strap of her weighty rucksack with the other, and headed towards the staff office behind the library counter.

Kristen watched her friend disappear into the back, a little shake of her head and a small smile on her face. Kaitlyn’s chaotic energy was always a welcome contrast to the quiet of the library. After about five minutes, Kaitlyn emerged from the office, having towel-dried her hair and thrown it into her signature messy bun. She signed on to the computer at the library counter. Kristen made her way over to talk to Kaitlyn. “It’s been pretty quiet today, honestly. I’ve just started emptying the returns trolley. I’m hoping to get some time

with Dion when she's back on campus this afternoon. Are you going to be alright for now if I head out for my lunch?" Kaitlyn placed a gentle hand on Kristen's arm. "Yes, doll, I got it. Go relax and make sure you eat, please." Kristen smiled, feeling grateful for Kaitlyn's support. "Thanks, Kaitlyn. I'll be back soon."

Kristen and Kaitlyn had known each other for eight years, ever since they both arrived at UCL. Kaitlyn had studied sociology for her undergraduate degree and returned to further her studies after graduating. She never hid the fact that she cared deeply for Kristen, often expressing her disapproval of Corbyn. Something about him seemed off, though she could never quite place it. Her instincts told her he wasn't good enough for Kristen, and he certainly wasn't any good at ensuring Kristen took care of herself.

Kristen appreciated Kaitlyn's concern, even if she didn't always agree with her friend's assessment of Corbyn. Deep down, she knew Kaitlyn's protective nature came from a place of genuine care and friendship.

With that, Kristen left the counter, ready for her much-needed break and headed into the staff office. There was so much occupying Kristen's mind that she couldn't bring herself to curl up with her treasured, tattered first edition copy of "Pride and



Prejudice." Nevertheless, she reached into her bag, retrieving the book and the small tupperware of food she had prepared at home. Sinking into her favourite armchair, she curled up, tucking her legs to the side. Popping the lid of the tupperware, she glanced at the food. Despite Kaitlyn's request that she try to eat, she couldn't bring herself to touch the leftover homemade mozzarella, spinach, and tomato quiche from the day before.

With a sigh, she moved the tupperware to one side and found her place in her book, hoping to escape her troubling thoughts, even if just for a brief moment.

It was nearing the end of her lunch break when Dion Sharp entered the library staff office. Kristen glanced up from her book and acknowledged Dion with a smile. Despite Dion being her manager, they had formed quite a friendship. You only had to look in Dion's eyes to see the hurt and pain she'd been through over the years; Kristen thought this might be why they clicked so well. Dion was tall, with hazelnut brown skin and shoulder-length glossy black hair. Today, she wore a knee-length plum-coloured skirt with a long-sleeved lilac top. "Afternoon, Krissy. The weather is lousy today! So much for it letting up and getting warmer," she said, dropping her designer handbag beside the sofa and perching on the edge of the cushion. "It really is. I'm glad you're done with those

meetings. There was something I wanted to talk to you about, actually." Kristen responded, placing a marker in her book and closing it. She shifted her position to engage deeper in conversation with Dion. "I'm all ears, for the next few minutes anyway," Dion replied, glancing at her diamante-studded wristwatch. Kristen's hands were resting on top of her book and her fingers were laced together.

She closed her eyes briefly as if to ground herself from some nervous feeling, opening her eyes she engaged in conversation. "The students from the business courses have all come to me, saying they don't feel they have enough resources to cover their studies. I was wondering if we could consider another publishing house."

Dion gazed at Kristen respectfully, retrieving a small leather organiser and a pen from her bag. She jotted down some notes. "I had been thinking the same, if I'm honest. We recently sold off a lot of the business course books because of similar staff complaints. I'll reach out to some publishing houses and see what I can do." Dion paused, looking at Kristen with concern. She reached across the small wooden coffee table between them and took Kristen's hand. "Is something going on, love? You don't seem yourself lately, and

I'm worried. I know Kaitlyn is too. You know you can tell us anything."

Tears threatened to fall from Kristen's eyes as she took a deep breath. "Honestly, I'm not sure. Something feels different, out of balance. But I just can't put my finger on what it is. My mind is constantly racing, like a hamster going full speed on its wheel." Dion's fingers grasped Kristen's hand a little firmer. "Don't forget you have us, okay? Whatever this is, you won't be alone. When you work it out, Kaitlyn and I will have your back. Now, come on. Speaking of Kaitlyn, she's a clock watcher and will be wondering where you are."

Dion smiled at Kristen, giving her hand one last squeeze before they both left the staff office. Kaitlyn smiled as they re-entered the library. Kristen noticed the now-empty returns trolley and smiled at Kaitlyn, while Dion made her way to her office at the back of the library. Kaitlyn pondered for a moment before asking, "Oh, do you have everything you need for the campaign rally tomorrow night? I know you were having trouble finding shoes." Kristen rolled her eyes. "I don't have shoes yet. I don't really want to go, honestly. Corbyn wouldn't notice if I turned up wearing a rubbish bag anyway. He's been so much colder towards me lately." Kaitlyn saw the light in her friend's eyes slowly diminish. "Could it just be the

campaign?" Kristen's head dropped slightly, and she crossed her arms, gripping her shoulders. "I think it's more than that, but it might just be in my head, you know?" Kaitlyn put her hands on Kristen's shoulders, briefly pushing back a stray curl from her face. 'Right, come over to my house after we close up. I'll open a bottle of wine and raid my shoe supply. Goodness knows I have enough; I'm sure we'll find you something.'

The ladies finished the last few hours of the shift tending to various tasks. Once the library was empty of students, they placed all the chairs under the tables and grabbed their belongings from the office. They didn't need to lock up, as the library stayed open for students twenty-four hours a day.

Kristen rummaged in her rucksack, retrieving her keys as they walked across the campus to the staff car park where Kristen's classic turquoise VW Beetle was parked. The car had belonged to her mum, seen her through college, and was still going strong. Kristen felt like if she sat in the car and inhaled deeply, she could still catch the faintest whiff of a distinctive floral perfume, a scent that instantly reminded her of her mother. She was only five years old when her mother fell ill, but one of her fondest memories was how her mother always wore that perfume and the silver locket

which now hung around Kristen's neck. Inside the locket was a sepia-toned picture of Kristen as a baby.

The ladies got into the car, merging into the busy rush hour London traffic for the twenty-minute drive to Kaitlyn's house. They discussed the events of the day and touched a little on what might be going on with Corbyn. Kristen's green eyes glistened with the threat of yet more tears; she didn't want to cry. She blinked rapidly, determined not to cry. It felt like that was all she had been doing lately. Kaitlyn placed a hand on Kristen's lap, changing the topic because she didn't want Kristen to cry. "So, you really made your dress for the gala? Didn't you want something new? I mean, it's a really public event; there will be press and paparazzi." Kristen considered her friend's comment for a moment. "Yeah, I did make it on my mother's sewing machine, and it's a beautiful dress. Corbyn told me to use his expense account, but you know me—labels don't mean anything to me. So I bought a prom dress from the charity store and a random bag of sewing materials so I could embellish it."

Kaitlyn's jaw dropped, and she let out a gasp. "You can't be serious! Corbyn isn't going to like this. He'll flap on about his image and whatever." Kristen pulled into the driveway, looked at Kaitlyn, and shrugged with a grin on her lips. "Oh well, I am starting to not care what he thinks. He probably wouldn't even notice anyway."

Kaitlyn reached into the front compartment of her bulging rucksack to find her keys. The ladies headed into the house, dropped their bags in the hallway, grabbed the chilled bottle of white wine from the fridge, some glasses from the cupboard, and headed up to Kaitlyn's bedroom. Kristen poured the chilled wine into the glasses while Kaitlyn went straight to her wardrobe, opening both doors and leaning back to examine the contents. She placed a hand on her chin and her other hand on her hip, thinking about what options would suit her friend who, she knew, had a fantastic body but insisted on walking around in a metaphorical sack, hiding it. Kaitlyn grabbed two shoe boxes, pulled all the hangers forward on the rail, and then slowly flicked through the last few garments. She grabbed three dresses and held them up to Kristen. 'Will you at least consider these?'

'Sure, I'll take a look at them.' Kristen took the hangers from Kaitlyn and examined the first option, a floor-length red off-the-shoulder chiffon dress with a ruched detail on the midriff. The second option was a knee-length blue satin one-shoulder dress with a diamante clasp at the bottom of the shoulder strap, and the last was another floor-length lilac purple strapless dress made of layers of organza with a satin trim. Kristen flipped her focus between all three

dresses. 'Do you really think any of these would work? I mean, the dresses are beautiful, but on me?'

Kaitlyn, who had been shuffling boxes around, turned to look at Kristen. She slowly stood up and made her way to stand in front of Kristen. 'You really don't see how beautiful you are, do you?' she exclaimed. Kaitlyn reached for the hair bobble in Kristen's hair and pulled it down, releasing Kristen's brunette curls. 'You're a goddess. People pay for hair like yours, and it is nowhere near as perfect as yours. And your bone structure... Don't even get me started.'

Kaitlyn placed her hands gently on Kristen's cheeks. 'You might be a bit lost right now, but I'll help you find yourself again.' She leaned her forehead against Kristen's.

Thursday seemed to come and go in a flash. It was approaching 7 p.m. on yet another wet and windy London day. Kristen, Kaitlyn, and Dion were setting out this week's book club selection, "One is a Promise" by Pam Godwin. This was not their usual genre, but as an exclusively women's group, Dion thought bringing a little spice would be a welcome change. Kaitlyn was unashamed of her slightly wilder side, whereas Kristen had reservations about reading a book so far outside of the classical literature she enjoyed. The familiar whir of the automatic doors signaled the arrival of female students shuffling into the library. The change of genre had garnered the club

some much-needed attention. Kristen's eyes met Kaitlyn's and then Dion's, a small smile tugging at the corners of their mouths.

Once the footfall of incoming students quieted, everyone settled into comfy reading spots with their copies of the book. Kristen found a space on one of the modern raspberry pink crushed velvet sofas, with Kaitlyn following suit. Kristen proceeded to read the blurb on the back cover. The first two lines made her stifle a snigger: "*One promise. One forever.*" Once upon a time, she might have believed this to be true, but with what had been going on in her life recently, she found it hard to hold on to that belief. She continued to read,

*"A promise that's destroyed in the most irrevocable way.*

*Two years later, an arrogant suit invades my heartbroken loneliness.*

*Clean-cut and stern, Trace is everything Cole wasn't."*

The words triggered a memory of her first love and childhood sweetheart, Grant Clayton. She hadn't thought about him in a long time. Their relationship had ended in the least amicable way possible. They had planned to go to college in London together and find a place of their own, starting the next chapter of their lives. But Grant had changed his mind at the last minute, choosing to study Business Management at Newcastle University instead. He wanted



the full university experience—the dorm life, the parties, everything.

Kristen remembered the pain of being left behind, studying alone at UCL, picking up the pieces of her broken heart and mourning the future she had been so sure of. The betrayal still stung, a dull ache she couldn't quite shake. She tried to pull herself back to reality and finished reading,

*"Promises resurface. Lies entangle.*

*And an impossible choice shatters my world.*

*I love two men, and I can only have one."*

The words dragged Kristen straight back into her thoughts. What if Grant Clayton somehow ended up back in her life? She wondered how she would feel. Would she still love him as she once did? She had always been a hopeless romantic, believing that your first love was meant to last forever. She couldn't help but think about Corbyn and how she once felt about him. If Grant ever came back, would her feelings for Corbyn change? She shook her head, trying to shake herself out of the rabbit hole she was falling into. Kaitlyn noticed her sudden movement. "You okay, Krissy?" she asked, concerned. Kristen glanced at the large silver clock hanging above the library doors. "Oh wow, time really got away from me!" She grabbed her

bag, shoving the book into the main compartment and retrieving her keys at the same time. "Corbyn will be home soon, and I need to pick up something for dinner on my way. I'll catch you both tomorrow." She gestured a brief wave to both Kaitlyn and Dion before fleeing out of the library.

Kristen began her drive home, her head feeling both heavy and light at the same time. Grant Clayton was the last person she expected to find his way back into her thoughts. Now that he was there, she couldn't do much else but think about all the fun memories they shared—the trips they took. One of her favorite trips was when they went camping under the stars, snuggling up by the fire and toasting marshmallows, sleeping wrapped up in each other's arms. Grant had been one of only two men she had ever been with, the other being Corbyn. Without a doubt, Grant knew his way around her body. He always knew how to make her crumble. She remembered the kisses on the side of her neck, just under her ear, trailing down to her collarbone. Each soft kiss left a searing hot sensation on her skin. She tugged at her lip with her teeth, remembering how Grant's dominating ways could send her wild. She vividly remembered one night in particular, her 18th birthday. It was a warm July Monday, and Kristen found herself in the comfortable confines of Grant's room, the soft glow of the bedside

lamp casting a warm, inviting light across their faces. The air was thick with anticipation and the subtle scent of beer, as they both sipped from their bottles, the cool liquid providing a stark contrast to the heat building between them. Grant stood tall and imposing, towering over Kristen's slender figure. His smouldering grey suit hugged his muscular frame perfectly, his blue tie adding a splash of color that only served to enhance his rugged handsomeness. He watched as Kristen toyed nervously with the heart-shaped pendant he had given her for her 18th birthday, her lush brunette curls resting gently on her shoulders. Kristen felt her heart flutter in her chest as Grant stepped closer, his presence dominating the room. His brown eyes locked onto hers, a smouldering intensity that made her feel both vulnerable and desired. She felt the soft fabric of her baby pink chiffon dress brushing against her skin, the gentle zipper at the back a subtle reminder of the intimacy that was about to unfold. Grant gently brushed a stray strand of hair from Kristen's face, his touch sending a shiver down her spine. He cupped her cheeks, tilting her face up to meet his gaze, and leaned in to capture her lips in a soft, tender kiss. Kristen felt her body respond instinctively, melting into his embrace as he deepened the kiss, his tongue exploring hers with a hunger that left her breathless. Her muffled moans caught in her throat as one of Grant's hands tangled in her curls, the other resting on the side of her neck. She felt a

surge of desire course through her, her body aching for his touch. She reached out, her hand resting flat against his defined chest muscles, the heat of his body radiating through the fabric of his shirt. With her other hand, she tugged at his tie, pulling him deeper into the kiss. She loved the way he tasted, the way his body responded to her touch. She felt his hands exploring her body, his touch leaving a trail of fire in its wake. He slid the zipper of her dress down, his fingers brushing against her bare skin, causing her to gasp. Kristen felt her dress pool at her feet, leaving her standing in nothing but her lacy underwear. She saw the way Grant's eyes darkened with desire, his gaze raking over her body, making her feel wanted and cherished. She watched as he slowly undid his tie, revealing his muscular chest. He discarded his suit, standing before her in just his boxers.

Grant pulled Kristen towards him, their bodies pressing together. He kissed her deeply, his hands roaming her body, exploring every curve. She felt his hardness press against her, causing a throb of desire to pulse between her legs. He lowered her onto the bed, his body covering hers, his weight a comforting presence. He trailed kisses down her neck, his tongue tracing a path to her breasts. He took a nipple into his mouth, sucking and nibbling, causing Kristen to moan and arch her back. She felt his hand slide down her

stomach, his fingers slipping underneath the waistband of her panties. Kristen gasped as Grant's fingers found her wetness, his touch sending waves of pleasure through her. He slid a finger inside her, his thumb rubbing circles on her clit. She felt her body respond, her hips bucking against his hand as he pumped his finger in and out of her. Grant watched as Kristen writhed beneath him, her green eyes glazed with pleasure. He couldn't wait any longer. He removed his boxers and positioned himself at her entrance. He looked into her eyes, seeing the trust and love reflected there. With a slow thrust, he entered her, her tightness enveloping him, causing him to groan. Kristen felt Grant fill her, stretching her in the most delicious way. She wrapped her legs around his waist, pulling him deeper inside her. He began to move, his thrusts slow and steady, building a rhythm that made her heart race. She felt her orgasm building, her body tensing with each thrust.

Grant felt Kristen's body tighten around him, her moans growing louder. He knew she was close. He increased his pace, his thrusts becoming harder, deeper. He felt his own orgasm building, his body tensing as he pushed Kristen over the edge. With a cry, Kristen came, her body convulsing around Grant's dick, her orgasm causing him to lose control. With a groan, he came, his cum filling her as they both rode out their orgasms, their bodies slick with sweat. As

they lay there, their bodies entwined, they knew that this was just the beginning. Kristen felt that their love story was just starting, and she couldn't wait to see where it would take them.

Almost home, she pulled into the car park at the Tesco Express. Turning off the car, she focused on herself in the mirror, noticing the distinctive pink blush which now adorned her cheeks and took a deep breath, trying to calm the intimate thoughts of Grant Clayton now soaring through her mind. Kristen left the car and headed into the store, her body feeling heavy and her muscles aching from the workday. She decided something quick and simple was the best option for tonight. Grabbing a basket from the entrance, she made her way to the hot deli counter and picked up a garlic and herb rotisserie chicken. She then grabbed a Caesar salad kit and some garlic bread slices. On her way to the self-scan checkout, she spotted a bottle of her favourite wine, an Italian Pinot Grigio called Caparelli. Just seeing the bottle took her mind straight back to the long weekend she had spent in Italy with Corbyn two summers ago. She could almost feel the warmth of the Italian sun and hear the laughter they shared over glasses of this very wine. The memory brought a soft smile to her lips, momentarily lifting the heaviness she felt.

With her items scanned and bagged, Kristen headed back to the car, her thoughts a whirl of past loves and present realities. She took a deep breath, reminding herself to focus on the present, even as the memories tugged at her heart.

Entering the house, she picked up the day's mail and placed it on the hall table alongside her bag. She carried the shopping bag into the kitchen and began preparing food. Glancing briefly at her wristwatch and then out of the kitchen window, Kristen noted it was approaching 8:30 PM. Where was Corbyn? Surely whatever business he was working on could wait until tomorrow? She prepared the salad using the kit she had bought, sliced up the chicken, and plated a portion for herself and Corbyn. She grabbed the wine and poured herself a sizable glass for a Thursday evening, sipping it while sitting at the kitchen table eating her food. After finishing and washing up her dishes, she retrieved her book club book from her bag on the hall table and, with her wine in hand, headed upstairs to the bedroom. Kristen slipped out of her pastel rainbow wool sweater and knee-length denim skirt, opting for her comfiest crimson silk nightie. She climbed into bed, feeling the cold sheets against her skin and the softness of the pillow pressing against the back of her head.

Kristen opened the book and began to read, losing herself in the words. The hourly beep of the radio alarm on Corbyn's side of the bed startled her. The clock flashed 11:00 PM in red numbers. With no sign of Corbyn, she marked her page with a bookmark from her nightstand and tucked the book away in the top drawer. Turning off her lamp, she closed her eyes, trying to give in to the comfort of the soft pillow supporting her head.

Her mind raced with thoughts of Corbyn. Where could he be? He hadn't called or left any messages. He couldn't be working this late, could he? Was he with another woman? Just when she thought there was no room left in her thoughts for anyone or anything else, Grant Clayton found his way in. She couldn't help but wonder what he looked like now. She hadn't seen him since they were 18. Kristen convinced herself that Grant would have the life they always dreamed of—the wife, the quaint rural home. With her mind so preoccupied, it must have finally sapped the last of her energy, and she drifted off to sleep, not waking until the siren-like noise of the radio alarm.

Kristen had taken this particular Friday off work. The charity gala was starting at 7 PM, and she couldn't ignore the feeling in the pit of her stomach. She didn't want to attend the event on Corbyn's arm, playing the role of his trophy wife. The façade of a happily



married couple and a doting wife was exhausting. For months now, her relationship with Corbyn had been strained. Kristen felt trapped, knowing she couldn't leave the marriage without upsetting her father. He had pushed her towards a future with Corbyn, convinced she wouldn't find a love like theirs. There was a time when Kristen believed this. Corbyn used to show his love in countless ways—flowers every Friday, love note trails, and weekly dinners at her favourite restaurants.

But everything changed when he won his seat in the party. No more flowers, he blamed the busy traffic. No more love note trails—he was rarely in his home office. No more dining out—he was barely home for dinner. Just like last night, when he still wasn't home at 11 PM. Kristen forced these thoughts away and opened the wardrobe. She retrieved the dress and sewing supplies she had purchased from the charity shop, laying them on the bed alongside the two shoeboxes Kaitlyn had given her. She had spent £50 on the dress and £5 on a random bag of buttons, beads, and other embellishments. The floor-length, figure-hugging, drop-back satin dress was sky blue with thin diamante straps and a small train of white organza at the back.

Sitting at her mother's antique sewing machine, Kristen planned to make a small belt to go around her waist, even though the dress

was already covered in glitter and sequins. She took a strip of white satin from the bag of embellishments, wrapped it around her waist, and fixed it with a pin. From a drawer, she retrieved some AB crystals leftover from a dress she had made for Dion a few months ago. Kristen decided to use these for the belt. She removed the fabric from around her waist and set to work. Once finished, Kristen placed the belt over the dress on the bed. It was perfect. This dress was probably the furthest thing from what Corbyn would have wanted her to wear for the event tonight. She opened the boxes Kaitlyn had given her. One pair of shoes were simple open-toe strappy silver with a buckle at the ankle and a kitten heel. The other pair were the same shade of blue as the dress, closed round toe with a silver ankle strap and a low heel. Kaitlyn knew that anything too dramatic wouldn't suit Kristen. She chose the silver pair. At 5'8", she was taller than most women she knew, so she preferred flats whenever possible. As she placed the shoes beside the dress, she couldn't help but feel a small spark of rebellion. Tonight, she would dress for herself, not for Corbyn.

Kristen spent the rest of her day doing something she should do more often: pampering herself. She drew a rose crème bubble bath, fresh rose petals sprinkled lightly across the plumes of bubbles. She lit a candle and retrieved her book from the nightstand, placing it

on the edge of the bath. Kristen climbed into the hot, bubbly water, the relief on her sore, tired muscles was incredible. She lowered herself into the water, feeling the heat spread from her ankles, up her calves, thighs, and finally her back as she eased against the slanted back of the bathtub.

Opening her book and setting her bookmark to one side, Kristen continued from where she left off, just at the beginning of chapter three.

*"His grin, complete with dimples, grows impossibly wider as I drink him in. Golden complexion, pillowy lips, straight white teeth, square jaw—every symmetrical feature renders a sculpture of masculine perfection."*

Reading this drew her back to thoughts of Grant Clayton and his heart-stopping good looks that used to render her dumbstruck.

*"Carved to perfection, rebellious around the edges, and flirtatious without opening his mouth, oh baby, he's all that and a lit fuse on dynamite."*

The description fit Grant perfectly. He could flirt without uttering a word; his eyes did all the talking. The fire, the hunger, the temptation—so much conveyed in a simple gaze.

The memory of his deep brown eyes, their piercing stare, made her skin heat up, a blush creeping onto her cheeks. Her knees pushed together and rose above the bubbly surface. She felt her hips writhing in the water, the thoughts of Grant's intense presence overwhelming her senses.

As she lay back, her curly hair piled on top of her head, she closed her eyes and let her mind wander. Thoughts of Grant filled her head, his brown hair, brown eyes, and that confident smile that could make her melt. She could feel her pussy getting wet at the thought of him and a moan escaped her lips. Her breasts, covered in foam, rose and fell with her quickening breath. Kristen reached for the rose petals floating on the water and let her fingers trail through the water. She imagined Grant's hands on her body, his strong, rough fingers tracing the curves of her waist, squeezing her ass, and pulling her close. His dominance and her submission were a match made in heaven, and she yearned for his control. As she sank further into the warm water, her fingers found her nipples, now hard and erect. She pinched and twisted, imagining it was Grant's mouth sucking and teasing her sensitive peaks. Her back arched, pushing her chest out, offering herself to her imaginary lover. Kristen's other hand trailed down her flat stomach, through her curly pubic hair, and found her clit. She began to rub slowly,

gently, as she imagined Grant's mouth on her, his tongue teasing her, licking her, driving her wild.

Her breathing quickened, and she let out a soft moan, her fingers working faster now, circling her clit, dipping into her wet pussy. She wanted to feel Grant inside her, his thick cock filling her, stretching her, but she held off, wanting to draw out the pleasure. Kristen imagined Grant's strong, muscular body over hers, his hands holding her down as he kissed her neck, bit her ear, and whispered dirty words of desire. Her fingers worked faster now, and she could feel her orgasm building. She imagined Grant's cock, hard and throbbing, and how it would feel sliding into her tight, wet pussy. She wanted it so badly, needed to feel him inside her. Her fingers slid inside, imagining it was Grant, and she cried out, her body bucking slightly in the water. As she neared her climax, she saw Grant's face in her mind, his brown eyes looking into hers, full of desire and passion. She wanted to make him cum, taste his sweet release, and feel his hot cum on her skin. With that thought, she let herself go, her body shaking as her orgasm ripped through her. Her juices flowed, and she cried out, her hands still working their magic, prolonging the sensation as she rode the waves of pleasure.

Kristen stepped out of the bath, her body glistening with water, and wrapped herself in a soft robe. The rose petals clung to her skin, a

reminder of her sensual fantasy. She applied her moisturiser, starting with her legs and working her way up, ensuring every inch of her skin was soft, plump, and hydrated. Having curly hair was difficult, especially for events like these. She couldn't find the motivation or energy to do anything with it. She applied a light layer of makeup, so fine it was barely there. A glimmer of sparkly silver shadow tinted her eyelids, and a slight pink blush enhanced her already rosy cheeks.

Kristen slipped into the blue gown, savouring the luxurious feel of the satin against her skin. The sequin detail and the crystal belt caught the light, casting glimmers on the ceiling. She slid on the shoes Kaitlyn had given her, fastening the buckles with a little space between the strap and her ankle. She adjusted the bottom of the dress and smoothed her hands down her hips, enjoying the liquid feel of the satin fabric under her fingers.

Suddenly, a vibration from her phone caught her attention. An incoming text message from Corbyn. Kristen rolled her eyes and opened the message.

*"I had to work. Lost track of time. I will send the car and meet you at the gala. C x"*

Kristen wasn't surprised by the message; this had become a regular excuse for Corbyn whenever they were supposed to attend events together. With a sigh, she dropped her phone into her silver clutch bag. She checked her reflection once more, smoothing down her dress, before heading downstairs to wait for the car. It wasn't long before the headlights of the black car illuminated Kristen's street. The driver pulled the car up to the curb and climbed out to open the door for Kristen. She exited the house, recognizing a familiar face—someone who had driven her and Corbyn to events many times before. She greeted the driver with a slight smile. "Hello, Harvey! I was hoping you'd be driving me tonight." Harvey Robertson, a short, portly gentleman with thick black hair peeking out from under his chauffeur's hat, had been employed by Corbyn's party for about five years. He stood at the open car door, his jaw dropping at the sight of the stunning vision in blue approaching him. "My, my, Kristen Knight, you look absolutely knockout tonight! I hope Mr. appreciates it."

They made general conversation about her work and Corbyn's campaign during the brief drive to the gala. If anyone might know what was going on with Corbyn, it would likely be Harvey. As the car approached a red light, Kristen took a deep breath, steeling herself for what she might find out. "So, Harvey, the campaign must be

really taking off. Corbyn has had to work so many late nights over the past few weeks. It'll be nice when it's over." Harvey's face twisted in confusion. "I don't know what Corbyn has been telling you, but he hasn't been working late much... actually, not at all lately. I see him leaving around 6 PM every day when I'm parked out front. I always offer to drive him, but he just tells me he's got a car waiting."

Kristen's heart sank, a chill running through her despite the warmth of the car. She forced a smile and nodded, her mind racing with questions. What had Corbyn been doing all those late nights? The knot of fear in her stomach tightened as they neared the gala, the glittering lights ahead contrasting sharply with the dark suspicions forming in her mind. As the car turned the last corner, it joined a queue of vehicles waiting to drop their occupants at the start of the red carpet.

Arches made from black and gold balloons adorned the main doorway of the city hall. Kristen didn't know if she could muster a fake smile that would last the whole evening, especially when her heart was breaking inside. The evening's itinerary now seemed even more gruelling: a three-course dinner, auction, raffles, drinking, dancing—all while trying to maintain the pretence of being a happy, doting wife with a protective husband. Protecting her hadn't



seemed like a priority for Corbyn for sometime. His image , however, had always been his top priority.

Her conversation with Harvey remained at the forefront of her mind. Kristen felt a knot of anxiety tighten in her stomach. The car inched forward, and she took a deep breath, steeling herself for the evening ahead. The car finally reached the entrance. Harvey stepped out, opening the door for her. Kristen forced a smile as she emerged, the flashing cameras capturing her every move. She took a moment to adjust her dress and clutch, then walked toward the entrance, each step feeling heavier than the last. Suddenly, a man's arm snaked around her waist, his hand settling at her hip. A gentle whisper tickled her ear with warm breath. "You look breathtaking." Corbyn kissed Kristen's cheek softly, lingering for a moment before pulling away to face the waiting press and paparazzi lining the edge of the red carpet. They made their way up the red carpet to the doors of city hall, stepping into the elegant, entertainment-themed event. Kristen's heart pounded as she forced a smile, her mind still reeling from Harvey's revelation. The evening ahead seemed more daunting than ever, a delicate dance of appearances masking the turmoil within.

It was almost like a switch went off in Corbyn; his game face was well and truly on this evening. He smiled and made subtle waving

gestures at various people dotted around the room. This fundraising event, held by Home-Start London, aimed to support local families in need. All the proceeds from tonight would benefit community family support. In attendance were local business owners, beneficiaries of the charity's work, local MPs, and councillors. It seemed like Corbyn was catching someone's eye every few seconds. He pointed people out to Kristen, explaining who they were if she didn't know, introducing her to various individuals, and reacquainting her with people she had met before. Her head spun, making it hard to tell if it was just her or if the room itself was moving. She felt like she was on a revolving platform, never standing still for long.

By this time, everyone had socialised and found their seats at their respective tables, ready for the dinner to begin. Kristen excused herself from the table, collecting her clutch from the tabletop. She placed a hand on Corbyn's shoulder. "I'm just going to use the bathroom." Leaning down, she planted the softest kiss on Corbyn's cheek and walked out of the main hall in search of some reprieve in the bathroom. Once inside the bathroom, Kristen stood in front of the mirror, taking in the beauty of her reflection. She felt relieved that Corbyn had at least seemed pleased by the effort she had made. Her thoughts wandered, wondering if there was anyone else

here tonight that Corbyn had his eye on. She retrieved her lipstick from her clutch and touched up her make-up. Taking a deep breath, she smoothed the fabric of her dress and made her way back into the hall.

As she reached the doorway, her heart sank and her body flushed in reaction to the scene before her. In her seat was a red-headed woman in a tight black dress. Corbyn was turned fully towards her, his entire focus on this woman. His arms rested on the tabletop, fingers clamped together, while one of the woman's hands rested over his and the other touched his cheek. She didn't want to see what was happening in front of her, but she couldn't bring herself to look away. Kristen's thoughts began to spiral. How far has it gone? How long has it been happening? Was she the reason he hadn't been home as much lately? Was she the car he waited for?

Corbyn leaned into the woman and whispered something in her ear. The woman's reaction was immediate, practically writhing in her seat. Kristen felt her heart shatter, the urge to run surging through her, but her body remained frozen, rooted to the spot. The room seemed to blur as tears welled up in her eyes. She felt a knot tighten in her stomach, a sickening mix of betrayal and heartbreak. Her breath caught in her throat, and she struggled to steady herself. This couldn't be happening. Not here, not now. Kristen's mind raced

with questions, each one more painful than the last. How long had he been deceiving her? What had she done to deserve this? She clenched her fists, her nails digging into her palms, trying to anchor herself in the midst of the emotional storm. Corbyn caught sight of Kristen, and his whole demeanour changed. He leaned away from the woman, pulling his hands out from underneath hers and tilting his head towards the doorway. The red-headed woman turned so quickly she nearly risked breaking her neck. Kristen recognized her as a member of Corbyn's party, someone she had briefly met at a campaign rally last summer. Alice something.

Kristen's body remained rooted to the spot. She realised she couldn't go back in there and play pretend anymore. Reaching into her clutch for her phone, she typed a message to Corbyn with nervous, shaking fingertips.

*"I don't feel too well. I think it's best if Harvey drives me home.*

*Krissy x"*

She sent the message and took a deep breath, her heart pounding. The weight of the evening pressed down on her, and she knew she had to leave. She couldn't face Corbyn and Alice, and couldn't keep up the facade any longer. Kristen turned away from the doorway, heading back toward the entrance, her mind racing and her

emotions in turmoil. Kristen found Harvey parked at the front side of the building. No words needed to be spoken; he practically threw his newspaper on the passenger seat and emerged from the car to open the back door. Kristen didn't hesitate or give her escape a second thought. She needed to be away from here, away from Corbyn. She knew she didn't want to be at her house tonight. She would most likely be alone, and that thought was unbearable. Clutching her phone, she dialed Kaitlyn. "Krissey?" Kaitlyn answered. Taking a deep breath and fighting the tears that threatened to spill, Kristen said, "Can I come to yours? Maybe stay for a few days? I just can't." The tears spilled over, and she crumbled, her body shaking with sobs. "Corbyn... a woman... touching," she managed to say between sobs. "Get yourself here now! I got you," Kaitlyn responded firmly.

Kristen gave Harvey the address to Kaitlyn's house. As they approached, Kaitlyn was waiting on the doorstep with a fleece blanket, ready to shield Kristen from the cold autumn chill. She draped the blanket over Kristen's shoulders and wrapped an arm around her, guiding her inside. Kaitlyn paused on the doorstep to reassure a very concerned Harvey that they would be okay, and then she closed the front door.

## CHAPTER TWO - Seeking Knowledge

A week had passed since the charity gala, and Kristen was still staying with Kaitlyn. Corbyn had been calling, messaging, and sending gifts and flowers. He even risked showing up at Kaitlyn's house a few times, only to be met with an angry, cold response: "She's not interested." Kristen had called in sick first thing on Monday morning, briefly explaining to Dion what had happened at the gala. Dion reassured her that work would be fine without her while she got herself together. Kristen spent most of the week planning her next steps. She knew that if she was going to separate from Corbyn, she would need something more tangible as evidence. On the Tuesday after the gala, before she left for her classes Kaitlyn left a few contact numbers for private investigators. Kristen sat at the kitchen table, the sweet and spicy aroma of her pumpkin spice latte filling the air. She dialed the first number on the list, but to no avail. The investigator wouldn't go near public figures. Frustrated, Kristen buried her face in her hands for a moment, then took a deep breath and dialed the second number.

"Bond Buster Detectives. - Revealing the Truth in Matters of the Heart."

Kristen spoke to the woman on the other end of the phone, who was inquiring about the type of investigation she needed. Without hesitation, Kristen replied, "I want someone to help me expose a filthy politician for exactly what he is." There was a laugh from the other end of the line. "Well, my darling, you have come to the right place. I have just the right guy for this particular job." They continued talking, discussing Corbyn's routine, the places he frequented, and the times. The woman then asked Kristen what had happened to make her suspect infidelity. Kristen's voice trembled slightly as she recounted the conversation with Harvey and described what she had seen at the gala. "That dirty... You sound like such a lovely woman too. He's gonna be sorry when he loses you. If he ain't, then he's just plain stupid."

Kristen felt a mix of relief and determination. "Thank you. I just need to know the truth."

"Don't worry, honey. We'll get to the bottom of this. I'll have my best guy on it. Expect a call from him soon." Kristen hung up the phone, feeling a glimmer of hope. She took a sip of her pumpkin spice latte, the warmth and spice soothing her for a moment. The path ahead was uncertain, but she knew she couldn't live in the dark any longer.

Kristen wasn't naive; she knew she wouldn't have any results for some time. She gave careful consideration to what her next actions should be. She had to return to that house and play pretend for a while longer. She had to act like she had forgiven Corbyn and that they could move past this. She hoped this would keep him from realising what was actually going on and what was about to happen. He was going to lose Kristen; it was just a matter of time. She took a deep breath, steeling herself for the days ahead. She would have to mask her true feelings, maintain the facade of a dutiful wife, and gather the evidence she needed. It wouldn't be easy, but she was determined. The truth would come out, and when it did, she would be ready to start anew.

That evening Kristen packed up her things and returned to the home she shared with Corbyn. He stood in the living room window, waiting for her. Relief seemed to rush through him as he blurted out, "I'm so glad you've come home. I'm so sorry for what you saw. I'm not even going to try and explain it away because you deserve more than that." Kristen gave him a slight nod, acknowledging his words, and then headed upstairs, fighting back her tears. She couldn't understand how Corbyn could so easily risk everything they had built together over the last ten years. She remembered a time when he would never have even looked at another woman. He



used to gaze at her with such love and desire in his eyes. She didn't see that in him anymore.

As she climbed the stairs, Kristen couldn't help but wonder if she had been responsible in some way, if she had done something to push him to it. But all she knew was that she needed answers so she could get out of this life with him. The home they shared was full of reminders of the happy times they had together, making her heart ache even more. In the privacy of their bedroom, she let her tears flow, each one a testament to the pain and confusion she felt. Kristen knew she needed to gather her strength and focus on her plan. It was time to find the truth and reclaim her life.

The rest of the week passed in a blur. Kristen hadn't been back to work yet, but she had been speaking with Dion and Kaitlyn to reassure them that she was okay and would be back soon. Corbyn had been home most nights by 6 PM, and they shared evening meals together. After cleaning up the dishes, Corbyn would thank her and softly kiss her cheek. She wondered if part of him was hoping she would initiate more, while another part of her wondered if she should try. After all, she wanted him to think she was back home and that they could work things out. Now, it was the weekend, and Corbyn had cleared his Saturday schedule of playing golf and paperwork. He told Kristen he had planned a whole

day together for them. Kristen's stomach churned with uncertainty. She didn't know how to feel about it, unable to ignore the nagging feeling in her gut. Kristen was getting ready for the day, unsure of what lay ahead. She dressed in a cream dress with navy pinstripe detail and a navy belt cinching her waist. Her brunette curls rested above her shoulders as always. She looked at her reflection, pleased with how she looked. She grabbed her navy cardigan from the bed and headed downstairs where Corbyn was waiting.

Corbyn was dressed in brown slacks and a cream cricket jumper with an open-collared white shirt underneath. He held a picnic basket in one hand, with a fleece blanket rolled up on top of it. In his other hand was a box tied with a red ribbon. Kristen walked into the living room, gently placing her cardigan on the armchair. Taking a deep breath, she hesitantly turned to face Corbyn. He presented Kristen with the beautifully tied box. "I know this is in no way enough to even begin to apologise, but I know how much you've wanted one of these." Kristen took the end of the red satin ribbon and pulled. She removed the top of the box to reveal a parcel wrapped in white tissue paper. She unwrapped the tissue paper to reveal a first edition of "The Wonderful Wizard of Oz" by L. Frank Baum. The book cover was beautiful, a beige and green hardcover with a maroon title and illustration in the same colour.

Kristen's hand covered her mouth in disbelief. She couldn't believe Corbyn had remembered what she'd told him about when she was younger. One of the fondest memories she had of her mother was being tucked into bed and hearing the tale of Dorothy and her friends. This book meant so much to her, and she had been trying to find a first edition for the longest time."Corbyn... I don't know what to say. It's beautiful. Thank you."

Kristen leaned in to kiss Corbyn's cheek but, at the last moment, changed her mind, pressing her lips to his. There was no hesitation from Corbyn, who returned her kiss, his hands on the sides of her face, holding her in that moment. Kristen felt more love from him in that moment than she had in months, her head flooded with thoughts of how good they used to be, how their desire for each other had burned so strongly.

Corbyn and Kristen stood in the middle of the floor, the book that had just been gifted resting on a table forgotten, as their passion ignited. Corbyn's hands gently cradled Kristen's face, his thumbs stroking her soft cheeks. Her eyes, usually so shy and reserved, now smouldered with desire. As they kissed, their mouths open and eager, Kristen's hands roamed over Corbyn's body, feeling the strength of his shoulders and the softness of his belly. She wanted him, the hunger between them was palpable. Corbyn's kiss became