

# ALL THIS TIME

STYLE & PROFILE: BOOK 1



KIM COX

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# COPYRIGHT

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ALL THIS TIME  
STYLE & PROFILE SERIES  
BOOK 1

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# DEDICATION

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*Thank you to my critique buddies Nancy, Sher, Liz, and Elaine and to my co-worker, friend, and reader, Bonnie for all your help.*

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ROMANTIC SUSPENSE & ROMANTIC MYSTERY NOVELS

LANA MALLOY PARANORMAL MYSTERY SERIES

BOOKS BY KIM COX

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*"All this time we were waiting for each other"*  
Lyrics from *All This Time* by  
~ OneRepublic ~

## Prologue

--

After she took the last swig of cola, she hurled the empty cup into the trash and paced across the plush carpeting in front of her desk. The office was quiet – everyone had left hours ago, leaving her to finish their work as usual.

If it weren't for her, the magazine would've folded years ago. But did any of them appreciate her? Her organizational skills? Her stamina? No! Damn all the Morgans, especially Joe Morgan.

Memories rushed into her mind. Ten years ago, when his wife died, who had looked after him day after day, made sure he ate, petted him, nurtured his aching heart and later, gave him her body to help him release the stresses he faced? She had, that's who. Well, she hadn't really had sex with him. A glass of wine with dinner and the knock-out powder fixed him right up. Who was to say what did or didn't happen when Joe had awakened beside her, and they were both naked?

She shivered at the image of sex with such a dried-up old prune.

To him, she had been just his secretary. His right-hand girl, that's what she'd been, taking care of his business when his grief proved too much for him to handle and his precious daughter had returned to college, leaving him alone. When she invited him to her home, it gave him a change of scenery, a reprieve from staring at the same walls and the same rooms he'd shared with his late wife for thirty-five years. Joe had made promises of a promotion within the company during those times to repay her for helping him through his pain.

When she told him she was pregnant, he wanted her to marry him and become his little missus, but that wasn't her style. Running Morgan Fashions magazine was her dream. Not playing mommy, nor nursemaid to an old man. She would've made the sacrifice, though, if only for a little while. At least until she gained control of the magazine. Then he caught her, found the telltale sign on the sheets that morning when he'd arrived early for breakfast. As soon as she turned off the shower, she knew she'd been found out. She'd lied about being pregnant and he knew it. Joe was furious, called their relationship quits and demoted her to the mailroom.

She ground angry tears from her eyes. At first, she planned to burn the place to the ground, but knew she could catch more Morgans with sweetness rather than vengeance, especially after Joe retired and handed the reins over to his daughter, Jenny. All his promises had been lies. Joe's plan all along had been to hand the company over to a blood relative.

That was ancient history. Her mind returned to the present. Too bad Joe hadn't died from his heart attack last night. Jenny had tried to keep it a secret from the staff and

everyone else. This girl keeps her ear tuned in for everything. That's the only way she would be able to dish out just desserts to the Morgans.

She slammed her hands onto the desk. After scratching her way through college, she'd be damned if her business degree would amount to nothing. Now that the managing editor position was available, there was no way anyone was stealing it from her. Jenny liked ambition in her editors, and none of the other potentials had her determination or her persistence.

The only threat to her plans was that wimpy Trevor Drake. He might be Jenny's best friend, but he didn't measure up. He relied heavily on his assistant to keep him organized and the bachelor in him couldn't turn away a pretty pair of legs if they killed him. Even if he got the position, she'd prove him incompetent and step right into the job and still come out as innocent as a newborn.

A sly smile spread across her lips. Like a mason lays his bricks one at a time to build a well-constructed house, she would triumph by tackling one obstacle at a time and use Trevor's laid-back, pushover personality against him. He'd be a cinch to handle.

Jenny Morgan, however, would be much more difficult to fool. Yes, one obstacle at a time.

# Chapter One

--

"I saw Chris this weekend." Trevor Drake spoke casually as he leaned against Jenny Morgan's doorjamb.

Jenny glanced at him then went back to what she was doing. She shuffled through the papers on her desk, looking for the article about the new high protein, low carbohydrate diet, advertised as being better than anything on the market. She didn't want to hear whatever Trevor had to say. The divorce put Chris out of her life where she wanted him to stay. The less she knew about him, the better.

Trevor slipped into her office, jingling the loose change in his pocket. "Did you hear me?"

"Can't you see I'm trying to work? Something you might consider doing for a change. You'll never make managing editor if you don't start to apply –"

"Remember Chris? Your ex?" He sat in one of her chairs without being asked.

She glared at him. "How could I forget? I'm still paying his lawyer bills and his many girlfriends still call the house. I give them your number, by the way, since it's your fault."

The smirk on his face made her want to leap from the chair and choke him. She imagined her fingers around Trevor's neck, squeezing. It felt good . . . too good. She clutched the arms of her chair to stop herself from committing a felony. "Of all days. I don't have time for this today." The deadline for the February issue was in three hours and her main article was MIA.

He leaned back and laughed. "Look, just because I introduced you to the guy, didn't mean you had to marry him. Don't blame me."

At the time, the idea of not marrying Chris Logan had seemed unimaginable. Blond and fashion model-gorgeous with the broadest shoulders she'd ever seen, bulging muscles under every inch of his salon-tanned skin and blue eyes that lit her soul with a single glance? The man she wasn't sexy enough to keep in her bed and out of those of her closest friends – none of whom had turned him down.

Maybe if Chris had been into guys, she wouldn't have had to deal with Trevor since he was one of the few friends she had left.

"Do you want to hear this, or not?"

"Will you get out of here and let me work if I don't?" She laid her red pen on the mahogany desk, leaned back in her chair, and threaded a finger through a stray auburn curl.

"No."

"Very well, shoot."

"Chris called me Saturday for a game of golf."

"And?"

"He's getting married."

"So, I'm supposed to care?" What woman in her right mind would consider marrying that gigolo? *One like you*, she reminded herself.

Trevor rubbed the dark hairs on his chin, usually an indication he wasn't certain how she'd react. "He's marrying Bianca Rosenberg."

"The Bianca Rosenberg?"

"There's only one."

"The Bianca Roseburg from Rome?" Her mouth was agape, and she clamped it shut.

Trevor grinned.

"Boy is she in for it!" Jenny couldn't help the wave of pity that rippled through her. Another hapless female was about to have her life trashed by Chris the Scumbag. Should she warn the poor woman?

No. Bianca would never listen to her, an ex-wife. Besides, they traveled in different social circles. She shook the thought away.

"That's why he wanted to meet with me. He gave me an exclusive interview about his wedding plans. It's hush-hush. They're marrying next week in a private ceremony on the Rosenberg yacht. Chris gave me their engagement photos to run with the article. The February edition hits the stands the day after their wedding."

"And the pompous, two-timing, conceited, worthless son-of-a-robber thinks I'll run it in my magazine?" With a push of her foot, Jenny swung her chair away from her desk. She stared out the window.

Trevor strolled over to her. Taking the arms of her chair, he spun her around to face him. "Don't tell me you're still obsessed with this guy?"

"Don't be ridiculous. I just don't want his name to appear anywhere in *Morgan Fashions*."

"But this is great timing. I wouldn't think twice about it if he weren't marrying the most eligible woman in the world. Not to mention the richest." He rested his hips against the edge of her desk and waited for her response, determination etching lines around his green eyes.

What was wrong with her? Of course, it was a wonderful opportunity. And Trevor finally showed savvy business sense – true dedication to his profession for once. And she, in her high-and-mighty CEO chair, shot him down. Why?

Because she hated Chris, that's why. But a professional businesswoman shouldn't let emotions get in the way. And normally, she didn't. So, why now? Lack of sleep. That's it. She'd paced the corridors at the hospital almost all night. Her seventy-year-old father's heart attack had forced them there in the middle of the night. If it weren't for the magazine's deadline, she wouldn't be at work.

She took off her reading glasses and rubbed her burning eyes.

"So? What do you say?"

"Huh?"

"The story?"

"You're right, Trevor. Go with it."

He reached behind him, fetched a bundle of papers from his back pocket and tossed them on her desk. "You might need these."



The papers curled on her desk; the edges ruffled. She eased her chair back in place and straightened the papers. The draft of the diet article she'd searched for all morning and afternoon was spread out before her. She massaged her aching temples.

Running out the door, Trevor chuckled over his shoulder. "Thanks, Boss."

She watched him leave, trying to think of something menacing to yell after him, but too tired to make the effort. She had to admit he looked good from behind. Nice tight rear, trim waist, and broad shoulders. Good attributes to pass on. Jenny shook her head, amazed at her foolish thoughts. This certainly proved she'd been without sleep and a man for far too long.

As handsome as Trevor was, he wasn't for her. They were much better suited as friends. He was special, her best friend.

Her mind drifted to their high school prom, and she could still see the one dark, unruly lock curled on Trevor's forehead.

They had been an item until she caught him with that cheerleader. It was a wonder they'd been able to remain friends. Were all men alike? Cheaters? Or was it only men of her generation? Her father had been faithful to her mother until the day she died, and he hadn't wanted another woman since. Was her father one of a kind, or was she the only one who attracted all the deadbeats?

In college, Chris roomed with Trevor. That's how she'd met her ex. Chris was all muscle and brawn whereas Trevor's physique maintained muscle but not to the same extent. She would describe Trevor as athletically built, but not overly muscled.

The intercom beeped and the voice of her administrative assistant shrill and tinny, thankfully, broke into her thoughts. "Yes, Lynsi?"

"The hospital is on line three."

"Thank you." She reached for the phone. "Hello?"

"Ms. Morgan?"

"Yes?"

"This is Dr. Andrew's nurse."

Jenny struggled to find her voice as her heart plummeted. "Has something happened to my father?"

"Your father is resting. The doctor would like you to come by his office for a consultation this afternoon. He has an opening at 4:30 if that's convenient."

"Is anything wrong?"

"He wants to go over your father's prognosis. You said you wanted to be informed as soon as possible."

"Yes, I'll be there." Jenny closed her eyes, massaged her achy temples, and struggled to get a hold on her emotions. Her hands shook as she picked up the final draft of her editor's letter for the magazine. She needed to concentrate, finish the letter, and go over the diet article one more time before she left.

How would she get through this day? How would she get her work done in time to meet the deadline? Only one way, buckle down and just do it. The managing editor job needed to be decided, but while she leaned toward Trevor, she had doubts. She didn't believe Della, Lynsi, or Sara were ready for the position. "If only Trevor would maintain

the same level of ambition he had displayed while working on the Rosenberg-Logan article. Oh well, it could wait until after her father recovered. She couldn't think about it now; at least, not logically.

\* \* \*

The long and trying day was almost over. All the articles were ready for the layout, except one—Trevor's. Jenny pressed the numbers 1-2-8 on her phone. "Sara, give me Trevor, please."

"Sure thing, Ms. Morgan."

"Hello. Trevor Drake here. How can I help you?"

"Is the Rosenberg-Logan article ready yet?"

"Oh, Jenny, happy talking to you again too."

"Cut the crap. Is it ready? Deadline is in one hour." She tapped her pen on the desk.

"Aren't we in a bad mood?"

If only he knew. She hadn't told him about her father yet. He'd been out of town, returning early this morning. Nor had she told anyone else—not even her father's closest friends. Her father hadn't wanted her to worry them. "The article?"

"It's finished. I'll drop it by in a couple of minutes."

"I've got to leave for an appointment, so hurry." The phone went dead and a few minutes later, her door opened.

Trevor handed her the article. She dropped it as if it burned her fingers.

"It won't bite you. Want me to have one of the other editors read this one?"

"No, I can do it." *Pull yourself together. Distance yourself.* She picked up the article with the tips of her fingers and straightened her shoulders.

The divorce had been final for two years. *This has nothing to do with you or your life anymore.* It was just another article about a man marrying a famous, wealthy woman.

After a few minutes, excitement curled her lips into a smile. "This is great writing, Trevor." The article was written with a great deal of emotion about the happy couple's past lives. Chris had grown up poor, working his way through college. And Bianca had had it all from birth. What a contrast! Chris's hard work and enthusiasm had been what attracted her to him when they first met.

The article went on to describe the fairy-tale wedding Bianca planned—the yacht, decorations, attendants, and Hawaii honeymoon.

Trevor, sprawled in a chair across from her desk, grinned and hooked one leg over the arm.

"What about getting a follow-up?" Jenny asked.

"That shouldn't be a problem."

"You'll need to arrange for another interview." Jenny held up a finger to indicate that was number one. "Especially since this is a private wedding."

"Okay. I'll call Chris in a couple of days."

She held up finger number two. "During the interview, you'll need the details of the actual wedding and the honeymoon."

"Details of the honeymoon? Aren't we getting a little too personal? Is that for the magazine article or your own personal information?" Trevor laughed.

Her face grew warm from his insinuation. "You know what I mean. Where they go and what sites they see."

"Okay, boss. Anything else?"

"The article's wonderfully written, Trevor. I'm impressed."

"I owe it all to you. I've taken your advice. I'm now a responsible adult."

"It's about time." Love and appreciation warmed her heart—love for a friend, of course—no less powerful than that of a lover. Just different.

A smile of satisfaction curved his lips, showing perfect white teeth. Then, he blew on his fingernails and rubbed them against his shirt. "I told you it would be great. You just have this lack of trust thing going on."

"I'll tell it to my shrink. Now, I've got to get out of here." She stood and started toward the door.

Trevor caught up with her, heading her off. "Want me to send the article to the layout office?"

"No. I'll do it tonight when I get home—just email it to me."

"You should have it in your inbox already. There's that trust thing again. Better talk to your shrink quick if you want a full recovery."

"Sure, next time I see her. Now, out."

Jenny turned him around and pushed him through the doorway.

"You don't have to shove. I can take a hint."

\* \* \*

She stood in the shadows, watching, listening, and keeping her eyes open. What a flirt! Trevor was certainly a clown. No ambition, no get-up-and-take-what-you-want. He wasn't a worthy opponent for her. Biding her time, she waited until they drifted out of sight and the hallways were clear.

Then, she made her way into the CEO office she would one day occupy. As she closed the door behind her, she leaned against it, threw her head back and sniffed the scent of the fine wood furnishings in the expensively decorated office. The smell of power. Just the fix she needed to carry her through the days until her dreams became reality.

The office really hadn't changed since she visited Joe many times during his days of grief. He should've awarded her the job she deserved and saved his baby girl the pain of losing it all.

\* \* \*

Dr. Charles Andrews met Jenny in his office. "Have a seat. We have a lot to talk about." Her father's cardiologist and the family friend placed an arm around her shoulders and led her to the couch where he sat beside her.

"Is it bad, Charlie?"

He frowned. "Joe's continued stability depends on how we proceed. We took him to the cardiac lab this morning and gave him the diagnostic cardiac catheterization. This showed –"

"What's that?"

"We ran dye through his arteries and used x-rays to see where the blockages were. Joe has ninety percent blockages in two arteries and seventy-five percent in a third."

Tears, held back all day, spilled over her cheeks. "Is there anything you can do for him?"

Charles handed her a tissue and wrapped his arm around her. "Would you like me to call someone to be here with you?"

She controlled herself. "No. I haven't told anyone yet."

"I know you haven't any family left, but what about friends?"

"No, no one." Right now, she didn't want to talk to anyone. She would contact Trevor later. "I'll be okay. Finish telling me about Daddy."

"Yes. PCTA, better known as an angioplasty procedure, is what I recommend."

There was the hope she needed. "Is it very dangerous?"

His expression was serious. "All procedures, especially on the heart, have some degree of risk, but it's a fairly simple procedure."

"How will ... I mean, what will you do?" Jenny cleared her mind of everything and concentrated on Charles' words. She needed to understand her father's prognosis completely for her own sanity. She couldn't bear to lose another member of her family. Not now.

"We'll insert an IV in his arm where he'll receive various medications."

"Will he be sedated?"

"Somewhat, but just enough to relax him. He'll be slightly drowsy but awake. Then we'll cleanse an area on his arm and numb it with an anesthetic. A balloon-tipped catheter will be inserted into the numbed area and advanced to the heart, using an x-ray to guide it."

She shivered. "Is that painful?"

"Not really. When the balloon is inflated at the point of blockage, Joe may feel chest pressure or discomfort, but that's normal."

"How long will the procedure take?"

"Generally, about two hours. Then, he'll be in recovery a short time before we move him back to his room. A nurse will continue to monitor his vital signs and condition. But if at any time during the procedure I feel his heart is stressed and there's a possibility of causing further damage, we'll discontinue and stabilize him."

"When? When will you do the procedure?" Tears stung the back of her eyelids.

"We'd like to get it done first thing in the morning. He looked at her and widened his eyes. "Are you all right? Would you like a glass of water?"

"Yes, thank you."

As if on cue, a nurse came in with a pitcher and glasses.

Charles smiled. "Thank you, Maggie. Just set the pitcher on the table. We'll help ourselves." The nurse left and Charles turned to Jenny. "I figured we'd need the water and asked Maggie to bring it in after a while." Charles filled a glass and handed it her.

She took a long sip. "Thank you." She shirked off the nervous chill that ran through her.

The doctor nodded. "Now, after tomorrow's procedure, I'll be able to give you a better prognosis."

"Can I see him now?"

"Sure. He's resting. Just don't let him talk too much or become distressed. Is there anything else you'd like to ask?"

"No, Charles, thank you." She hugged him briefly. "Tell Claudia I miss her and to give me a call the next time she's in town." Charles' daughter, Claudia, had been one of her best friends in high school, but she rarely saw her anymore since she'd married and moved to Georgia.

"I'll do that. She usually calls once a week with my grandson's progress. He took his first step last week."

"That's wonderful! I can't wait to see little Jamie." Jenny smiled even though the knot in her stomach ground into her backbone. The longing for a child and husband of her own was more persistent these days, as if it were the only other purpose she had in the world. The business wasn't as exciting as it once was – the satisfaction of putting out a top-notch magazine was no longer as important. Without a family to share it, her life was empty. Was it her sister's or her mother's death that made a family of her own more important now? She didn't know, but she knew life was too short to waste without true love.

A nurse left her father's side as she stepped into his room. Jenny gazed at him sleeping. Always a vibrant man for his age, now, he was ashen, weathered, balding, wrinkled, and old. Lying, stretched out in the bed, he looked much smaller than his normal six-foot-three. Suddenly exhausted, Jenny clutched the side rail of his bed to keep from tumbling over. A sob threatened to escape, but she pushed it deep inside. She couldn't lose it now. Not at her father's bedside.

He opened his eyes and patted her hand.

"Jenny –"

"Shhh," she said, placing a finger to her lips. "The doctor said you're supposed to stay calm."

He clamped his mouth shut and drew his brows together, clearly agitated.

"I didn't mean to wake you. I just wanted to see you before I leave. Just to make sure you're being good, mind you." She reached over and put a soft kiss on his forehead as she squeezed his hand. "I love you, Daddy." She choked back another sob.

What would she do if she lost him too? Her stomach twisted into knots. Holding her emotions at bay, she smiled. But the tightness in her chest intensified.

"You get some sleep now," she whispered. "I'll be back first thing in the morning."

"Jenny, I need –"

"No." She shushed him again. "Wait and tell me tomorrow night when you're stronger. Good night now. I'll be here bright and early in the morning."

## Chapter Two

--

Jenny entered her apartment, flipped on the light, and bolted the door. At the bar she stocked for business associates, she poured herself a scotch and dropped in two chunks of ice.

Her five-year-old basset hound, Angel, met her at the wet bar, wagging her tail. "What you want, girl?" The dog ran into the kitchen and brought back an empty bowl. "Ah, you're hungry?"

She poured dry food into the dish, and Angel dug in, stopping to look lovingly at her between gulps.

Jenny scratched the top of Angel's head, kicked her shoes off at the bedroom door and padded to the living room where she flopped into her favorite overstuffed chair. The drink sloshed from one side of the glass rim to the other, almost spilling onto her skirt.

She steadied the crystal tumbler and took a sip. The bitter taste made her wrinkle her nose. The liquor slid down her throat, warming as it soothed and calmed her nerves.

Fear and loneliness wafted over her. She couldn't lose her father, not after losing everyone else in her family – her mom and her sister, Beth. She just couldn't.

Angel ran to her, placing paws on her knees. "What now?" The hound high-tailed it to the door. "Not now. You went out with Ms. Tremble less than an hour ago."

Ms. Tremble, the housekeeper, loved animals and enjoyed taking care of Angel as part of her daily chores. Before Jenny had hired a housekeeper, she took most of her lunches at home, and she made sure to lay out sheets of newspaper in case Angel had to go before she was able to get back.

Angel jumped for her leash hanging behind the front door.

Jenny snapped her fingers at her. "Come here." As she rubbed the dog behind her ears, she said, "Let me relax a bit and we'll go outside in a little while."

The phone rang. She'd barely said hello before Trevor yelled into the phone. "Why didn't you tell me? He's like my own father! Maybe even more than my own."

"I was just getting ready to call you."

"Why didn't you tell me this morning? This afternoon?"

"I wasn't ready –"

Trevor's voice was cold. "We've been friends for sixteen years. It's about time you started trusting me and stop being selfish."

"But I-I'm not. I didn't want to tell you until I knew the prognosis."

"Bull!"

"I'm sorry, Trevor. I'm not myself. Please forgive me." The scotch was having a strange effect. It made her do and say uncharacteristic things. She'd never apologized to Trevor before; at least, not so easily.

His voice changed from anger to concern. "Are you okay?"

"I'm holding my own. I'll be fine."

"So, how's our old man doing?"

Tears dripped onto her cheeks again. Her throat constricted, cutting off the oxygen from her lungs. "Oh, Trevor! He's having heart surgery in the morning."

The question was left unasked, but she knew he understood. "I'll be there with you. Don't worry."

"And I've been thinking about Mom and Beth."

He sighed. "This has to be hard on you. You've lost so much. But your father isn't your mother. He doesn't have cancer. Cancer's a cruel, unprejudiced disease."

"And heart disease isn't?"

"Your father's a strong man. Be thankful for that."

"I am, but Dad's older. Mom was only sixty and they could do nothing for her. No hope, they told us."

"I remember." Trevor's voice was low and tender.

"And poor Beth didn't even get a chance to have a life. She was so young." Jenny shook her head.

"Beth had a tragic accident. Your father's in good hands at Sevierville General. Charles Andrews is one of the finest cardiologists in the country and one of the best surgeons. You're lucky to know him."

Just talking to Trevor made her feel better. She should've talked to him earlier. "I'm lucky to have you to remind me too."

"Feeling better?"

"Some."

"What time do you want me to pick you up?"

"You don't have to do that. I'm not helpless. I can drive."

"I insist. I'm going to be there too. There's no need to drive two cars. Besides, I want to."

"That means a lot to me. I'm glad you're my friend." Mushy. Now, she knew that was a reaction to the scotch. She set the now-empty tumbler in the sink.

\* \* \*

Two grueling hours ticked away. Still, there was no word from the doctor or any of the surgical staff. If they didn't hear something soon, Trevor feared he'd have to tie Jenny to the chair. Either that or she'd be in great shape for the spring marathon.

"You want to get a bite to eat?" Trevor smiled the sweetest, most reassuring smile. Maybe food would calm her.

"I can't eat a bite until I hear something. And I'm not leaving this room."

Out of the corner of his eye, Trevor watched Charles stride toward them dressed in his surgical greens.

"Is it over? Where's Dad?" Jenny asked, running to meet him.

"I just wanted to let you know what's been going on. Sorry it took me so long to get out here."

"Was there a problem?" Trevor asked, placing an arm her.



"After opening the arteries, we placed stents into them to hold them open. We got two, but the last one gave us trouble and Joe started having chest pains."

"Oh my God!" Jenny clasped her hands over her mouth.

Trevor tightened his grip on her.

"He's stable now and on his way to recovery. We just want to keep an eye on him a while a little longer to make sure. I'll be back shortly as soon as we're sure he's out of the woods. I must get back now. Don't worry, you know he's a tough bird." The doctor turned and headed back the way he'd come.

Jenny paced the floor another twenty minutes, glancing at her watch frequently.

"Jenny, come and sit. You're making me nervous," Trevor said.

She did as he requested, but then her knees bounced, her heels clicking on the tiled floor. Trevor grasped her hand, drew her to him and placed a kiss on her cheek. "It'll be all right, I promise."

In his arms, she calmed down and after a little while, dozed into a fitful sleep. She probably hadn't slept since her father's first chest pain. Her eyelids twitched.

Oh, how he loved her. He just wished he could tell her. In a slow, comforting massage, he rubbed her upper arm. Her twitching ceased and her expression became peaceful. Her breath sounds evened out.

The doctor pulled off his surgical mask as he exited the recovery room and walked toward them. Jenny jolted awake as if she sensed his presence.

"Charles?"

"He's in CCU and stable. Come into my office and I'll fill you in." Once inside, Charles invited them to sit on the sofa, and he sat on his desk's front edge. "Would you like something to drink? Coffee? Tea? Water?"

"I think we'll explode if we have another sip, Charles. Please go ahead with what you wanted to say." Trevor rubbed the thin beard on his chin.

"As I explained, we opened two arteries. The third one is still blocked, but it doesn't place him in any imminent danger. However, I'd like to keep an eye on it."

Jenny sat forward; her hands white-knuckled on the arms of her chair. "He's going to make it, isn't he?"

"Jenny, honey, your father is a strong man. There shouldn't be a problem. We'll know more in twenty-four hours."

A sigh of despair escaped in her breath as she slumped back in her chair.

"Jenny, your father can live for a long time. If he follows the plan I've set for him, he should show improvement within the next few months. That means six months of not being stressed, taking his medication as prescribed, no smoking, no alcohol and eating a low-fat heart-healthy diet. The dietician will talk to you before he's released. Once his strength returns, he'll need to exercise regularly."

"I'll see to that," Jenny said.

"We'll see to that," Trevor corrected. He wanted her to know he'd be there to help.

"When can we see him?"

Trevor's heart broke for her. He'd been with her through many ups and downs, though she rarely acknowledged him. Leaving her side now or ever wasn't an option. She just didn't know she needed him – not yet.

"We gave him a stronger anesthetic to help him rest. As soon as he sleeps that off, the nurse will let you know."

Jenny sprang to her feet. Trevor stood and reached for her hand. She sat back down and buried her face in his shoulder. Her body trembled. "I'm here for you. Remember that always. I'll never let anything happen to you. As long as I live," he added.

\* \* \*

An hour later, Joe had awakened, and the nurse walked them to his door. "Fifteen minutes, tops. He needs his rest," she said with a scowl.

"Yes, ma'am." Jenny's emotion-filled voice wrenched at Trevor's gut.

She straightened her skirt, wiped her tear-stained face, squared her shoulders, plastered on a smile, and entered the room. He followed behind her, admiring her inner strength.

"Daddy, you look so much better." She rested her hand on his shoulder.

"Hogwash. Don't play with me, young lady. And don't kid a kidder." His words fell short of comforting, and his voice was groggy and weak. Jenny held his hand and he clung to her.

Trevor patted his forearm. "Joe, it's great seeing you again. Sorry I wasn't here sooner, but I didn't know."

"I told Jenny not to tell anyone. Don't worry about it, son."

"Don't talk, Daddy. You'll wear yourself out."

"I won't stand for anymore babying. I need to tell you something." He stared into her eyes.

Trevor gave her shoulder a squeeze for reassurance.

"What, Daddy?" she asked in a whisper.

"Remember your promise?"

"Promise?" She wrinkled her nose and drew her eyebrows together as if she was trying to remember. "What promise?"

"My grandchild?" Crimson covered Jenny's cheeks.

A grandchild? What did Joe mean by that? Was Jenny expecting? Trevor didn't know she had a lover. A flash of jealousy roiled his stomach.

"Don't worry about that now."

"I have no choice. I need to ask you to put a rush on that order." Joe's eyes moistened. Order? Realization clicked.

"What do you mean?" Jenny fiddled with her unruly mane of long, red waves.

"Charles told me if I wanted to survive . . . I needed to take care of myself and live by a set of rules." Joe stopped and closed his eyes, then opened them again and smiled. "Hell!" He chuckled. "I've always pushed the rules right out the window." He looked

point-blank into Jenny's eyes. "I'm serious. I want to see my first grandchild before I'm gone."

## Chapter Three

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Jenny left her father's room, staring into nothingness, her eyes glazed over. "What am I going to do?"

Trevor led her to a blue-cushioned chair in the waiting room. The chair shifted when she dropped into it as if all her strength was gone.

"Do you have any idea how you're going to pull this off?" *Could Joe's request be the chance I've been looking for?* Then the possibility of her having another father option cut through him.

Jenny stared down at her hands. "No. If I did this, I would only have a few months to find a decent man and get pregnant to have a child within the year." She met his gaze. "What about a sperm bank?"

His heart sank. He couldn't believe she suggested such a thing. If Jenny was serious, he'd be out of the picture. "Come on, be serious. You can't do that."

"Why not? Plenty of unmarried women do it."

"You want your father to live out the year; not shove him over the edge. I'm sure he wants a son-in-law, too, not just a grandchild. Plus, you want to know what you're getting. I don't trust those places. Your child could have a genetic predisposition to be a serial killer and you wouldn't even know it."

"A genetic predisposition to be a serial killer? That's ridiculous! You're right though, my dad wants me to have a husband too. And as a Catholic, I don't think the bishop would approve of me being a single mother or using a sperm bank."

He felt a sense of relief wash over him, warming him inside. "Do you have any prospects for a husband-to-be?" He didn't think she had one, but his curiosity got the better of him. Was there someone special in her life that he didn't know about?

"No. I don't even have a boyfriend. Heck! I haven't had a date in months."

Who was she kidding? More like a year. Well, as far as he knew, anyway.

How could he make Jenny see him as potential husband material? She felt comfortable going out to lunch or dinner with him, but it seemed she thought of it as purely business. He'd lost count of the number of times he'd wanted to kiss her, but she always emphasized how much his friendship meant to her, leaving him feeling guilty.

Hurting her was the last thing he wanted. If he'd acted on his impulses, they both would've been in trouble. Because until now, he hadn't been ready for the wife and family bit.

Things changed. He wanted a real family. Someone who would be there when he came home. His father died when he was only ten and after he left for college, his mother traveled all the time. When they made the bumper sticker, *Retired and Spending My Kid's Inheritance*, they must have known Marlene Drake.

Now that he was ready, the opportunity slapped him in the face like a snowball. And he planned to grab it. Convincing Jenny would be the hardest part.

Trevor chuckled deep in his throat. "I guess you could check out the personal ads in the Yorkville paper."

Jenny glared at him.

"Seriously, Jenny. How do you feel about all this? Are you ready for a baby? For a husband?"

Her eyes misted. "You don't know how much, Trevor. That's all I've wanted for a long time. But with my marital situation, I..." She sighed without finishing.

The hopelessness on her face warmed his heart. What did he have to lose? "I have a proposition for you. How would you like to marry me and have my baby?"

"Stop kidding around."

Kidding? Why would she think he was kidding? In all the years since high school and as deep as their affection went, she'd never once taken him seriously. Why did she always think of him as the immature jerk he had been back then? He would make her see him for the changed man he had become – whatever it took.

He took her face in his hands and tilted her head, gazing deeply into her eyes. His fingers caressed her skin. The warmth of her cheeks spread to his fingertips. Her big brown eyes were doe-like, looking back at him.

"I'm not kidding. A son or daughter would make me a happy man. With your beauty, you know our kid would break hearts from birth to adulthood."

"But Trevor –"

"No buts. Don't give me an answer today. In the last forty-eight hours, you've been through more than anyone should."

"You can't throw your life away for me. The parties you love. The women –"

"Shhh, not now. I don't need parties. And I'd love to have you accompany me to any party in town. The other women can survive without one more stud on the prowl." He rubbed his chin. "I think I'd like to be a father. I have one wish though."

"What?" She cocked her head.

His heart skipped a beat. "If we have a boy, I hope he has my hair. I don't know what he'd do with all those red curls."

\* \* \*

After Trevor dropped her off, Jenny took a long, hot shower. The warm water relaxed her. The shower massage relieved some of the tension from her tight neck and shoulder muscles down to her calves. But she couldn't stop thinking about the promise, or Trevor's proposal. How could she take advantage of his friendship?

She couldn't imagine anything he'd gain from marrying her. How could she sleep with her best friend? That was too weird. At one time, she would've done anything to hold onto him. *Yeah, and luckily, I came to my senses.* Could he have changed? Had he grown up? Was he finally ready to settle down, had he chosen her? Maybe he cared more for her than she thought. She couldn't let herself believe that. Not yet. Not without proof. Her heart was too fragile.

The warm water splashed her face, and she moved forward as it ran over her hair and along her back. *Relax, think about it tomorrow.* Everything would be clearer after a good night's rest.

After the shower, she wrapped a towel around her torso and went into the spare bedroom. Angel lay spread-eagled on her back. A year had passed, and the extra bedroom remained unfurnished except for curtains, Angel's doggie bed and a few toys she no longer played with. However, when Angel craved attention, she grabbed a toy and brought it to her.

"Hey, girl!" Angel awakened, appearing annoyed at first as she flipped onto her belly. Then she hopped up, stretched, wagged her tail, and ran to her.

She scratched her behind her ears. "I know what you need. A walk." Angel jumped on her leg. "We both need the exercise. Let me get dressed and we'll go out. We don't want to get fat, do we?"

She laughed at herself. If she did what her father wanted, getting fat would happen regardless of how many walks she took. If? Was she really considering not granting his wish? Maybe she should agree to half of his offer—let him father her child by sperm donation and forget the marriage. But that went against her personal beliefs.

She'd wanted a child for a long time. At thirty, her biological clock ticked so hard, it pounded against her insides. As much as it pained her to think about it, if her father died, she'd have no family left. So, why not have a child? Someone to love and someone to love her back. Her parents raised her to believe in family values and parents included a father, a mother, and a child.

Besides, Trevor would never go for it. He'd never be *just* a sperm donor. Settling down wasn't easy for him but being raised without a father for most his life gave him an old-fashioned outlook about fatherhood. His father had died not long after his tenth birthday. He'd missed his father terribly and vowed he'd be a part of his child's life no matter what.

She dried her hair, dropped the towel, and pulled on the underwear, jogging pants and a sweatshirt she'd laid out on the bed. Socks, walking shoes, gloves and a winter jacket finished her ensemble.

In the kitchen, she started a pot of coffee. With Angel's leash in hand, she yelled through the house, "Angel!" Her nails tapping on the hall's hardwood floor reached her long before the basset hound became visible.

They walked along the sidewalk of Town Park. Snow flurries swirled around them in the darkness and Jenny was glad she'd dried her hair. Though she tried not to think about Trevor's proposal, she couldn't stop it from entering her mind as Angel stopped to sniff yet another light pole.

Her father's request had shocked her. She considered herself a good daughter and thought him proud of her. Was she somehow inadequate now?

The look on Trevor's face when her father said he wanted a grandchild replayed in her mind. What was the look? Surprise? A little, maybe, but his first expression was anger, then concern and last, it was satisfaction. Was he contemplating being the father even then?

Jenny thought she'd loved Trevor when they were in high school, but he hadn't wanted her then. He'd thrown it all away by seeing someone else. She even suspected he'd introduced her to Chris because he felt sorry for her. With his male ego, Trevor no doubt thought she'd never gotten over him.

Angel yanked the leash, running ahead of Jenny in an uncharacteristic burst of speed.

She dashed after the dog, her shoulder throbbing from the jerk. Ahead, another dog walked alongside the sidewalk alone. Getting her footing, Jenny halted. "Angel! Heel!" But it was no use; she was running along for the ride until the hound decided to slow down. Angel strutted along beside the other dog, sniffing.

After sizing up the stray as friendly, she knelt beside him. "What are you doing here by yourself, huh, boy?" The little dog wagged his tail. He looked like a cocker spaniel. "Where's your owner?" Jenny asked, though she knew the pup couldn't answer.

Before finishing their walk, she patted the other dog's head then motioned Angel along. The spaniel followed. Well, maybe they would see his owner in a little while. She'd be sure to give them a lecture on the dangers of letting their pet run around loose on a busy highway.

Shortly, a tall gentleman came huffing and puffing beside them with a dog-less leash. "Lucky! Come here!" The dog wagged his tail and ran to the man.

"Oh! Is this your dog?"

"Yes. Sorry if he bothered you."

"No, no bother at all. I was just a little concerned about him running around alone."

"He broke free of his leash. The latch opened. Thanks for watching over him. I appreciate that."

"You're welcome." She extended her hand to him. "I'm Jenny . . . Jenny Morgan."

"And I'm David Becker," he said, taking her hand and shaking it firmly. His black hair peeked out from under the front of his toboggan hat.

David was a nice-looking man in a cozy way, though not drop-dead gorgeous. His jogging suit hung loosely, showing either he'd lost weight, or baggy clothes appealed to him. She could see him in the big and tall men's section. His cheeks were pink from the cold. "Live around here?"

"Yes, just a couple of blocks." David pointed in the direction from which he'd come. "I moved into the neighborhood a few weeks ago. Thanks again for watching Lucky. My wife, Linda, is worried sick. She waited back at the house while I looked for him. I'm sure Linda would love to meet you. She's missing her friends since the move from Ohio."

"That would be nice." Jenny dug a piece of paper and pen from her coat pocket. "Write your phone number on this and I'll give her a call sometime." She smiled.

David jotted his number onto a piece of paper. "That'd be great." Then he handed back the paper and pen. "Well, I'd better be getting home."

Another man wearing a hooded jogging jacket trotted up beside of them. His shoulders were slumped over from the cold and Jenny crooked her neck to see his face. "Trevor? What're you doing here?"

"Came by to check on you, but you weren't home. I figured you'd be out walking that mutt." Trevor gave David the once over with disapproving green eyes.

"Angel."

"What?"

"Angel, not mutt." Jenny remembered David. "Forgive my manners. This is my friend, Trevor Drake. Trevor, this is David, a new neighbor."

David stuck his hand out and for a moment Jenny thought Trevor would shun it. Finally, he took the hand offered.

"Happy to meet you, David."

"Likewise. Now if you'll forgive me, I must get Lucky home. Jenny, maybe we'll see each other again soon. You have my number." Taking Lucky in his arms, David rushed off.

"Who was that?"

"I told you who he was. David Becker." Trevor's nostrils flared and his jaw twitched.

"What are you doing out here in the freezing cold, talking to strange men?"

"Man, not men and David wasn't strange."

"You know what I mean. He could've been a rapist. Or were you looking for someone to make you pregnant behind my back?"

"Behind your back?" So, that was it. Jenny couldn't help but laugh. She'd be angry if it weren't so funny. "You've got to be kidding! Trevor Drake, stud of the universe – jealous?" Another chuckle burst forth.

"I don't see anything funny about this. I'm worried about you, so I rushed over to see if you were all right. And I catch you out here, talking and exchanging phone numbers with a stranger."

"You are serious." She laughed so hard; tears trickled from her eyes.

"Stop laughing."

"If you'd listen to yourself, you'd laugh too." With a tug at Angel's leash, Jenny turned toward home.

Trevor jogged along beside her. "Stop laughing!"

Outside her building, she turned to him, dried her tears, and drew her lips inward, trying to look serious. "Would you like to come in for coffee? Hot chocolate? Me?" She giggled.

Trevor finally smiled. "Yes. Coffee would be nice. Need something to warm my bones." He blew into his gloved hands.

"Good. Me too. It's freezing tonight. They're calling for three inches of snow by tomorrow."

He caressed her arm lightly and she turned to face him. Even under the heavy coat, her skin tingled.

"Look. I didn't mean to behave like an idiot. I need to talk something over with you."

As they entered her apartment, Trevor's proposal of marriage flashed into her mind. She released Angel and hurried to the kitchen to get their coffee.

Her hands shook as she carried a tray with a small pot and two cups and set them on the coffee table. Jenny poured Trevor a cup, then one for herself before sitting next to him on the couch. She took a long sip without glancing his way, relishing the way the liquid warmed her. Her nerves were on edge from anticipation. She braced herself for it.



"Jenny, I got another call from Chris today. He left a message on my voice mail. He wants me to be the best man at his wedding next week."

Not Chris again. She didn't want to hear this. "Why are you telling me this? Go if you want. You don't need my permission."

"Don't you see? That will be our chance for the follow-up article. I won't have to call and make another appointment with Chris later. I'll have eyewitness coverage of the entire event."

"Oh? Yes, do it." Her cheeks flushed with relief, soothing her like a warm summer drizzle. Thank heaven he hadn't proposed a double wedding. That would be too ironic.

"What's wrong with you?"

"Nothing." She twirled and twisted her hair between her fingers. Nervous tension churned in her stomach, then stilled in anticipation of his next words. Dread filled her. She knew there had to be more.

"Anyway, I thought it would be great for you to go with me."

There it was. "No way. I wouldn't set foot on that yacht if someone held a gun to my head." She rolled her eyes skyward. How could he ask such a thing of her? Trevor, better than anyone, knew what Chris had put her through.

"Since I'll be standing up for Chris, I'll need your help. I can't take notes, but you can. You'll be my date."

"Get someone else."

"Grow up, Jenny."

Her spine stiffened. "How dare you! Playboy of the year, telling me to grow up."

"That may be, but you're the one acting all silly over this wedding. You're still infatuated with this guy, aren't you?"

Her jaw dropped. "I am not! And why are you so jealous all of a sudden?"

"I'm not jealous. Don't turn this around on me. You always do that."

"Then, what was that about with David?"

"So, I jumped to conclusions. After the promise you made to your father, what do you expect? Then your little speech about having just a few months to find a decent man. Hell, I thought you were on the prowl."

She arched her left eyebrow and stood, ready to escort him to the door. Of all the nerve! "On the prowl!" The tips of her ears burned with anger.

He grabbed her hand, bringing her back onto the couch beside him. "Let's not fight. I didn't really mean it like that. Bad choice of words."

Jenny jerked her hand from his grip. "I'm not one of those girls you hang out with at bars."

His sad, puppy dog eyes melted her ire. She could never stay mad at him for very long. Especially when she knew her anger stemmed from other things. The whole situation was preposterous.

What was it with them lately? Her father's illness or his request? Trevor's proposal? All of it was driving them both crazy. *And now, he wants me to attend my jerk of an ex-husband's wedding! Sure! Why not? What more could possibly happen to add to my already confused, chaotic existence?*

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Kim Cox, writes fun, action-packed cozy paranormal mystery novellas, and spine-tingling romantic suspense novels with fast-paced suspense and tender, yet passionate love stories. Her characters are fresh, humorous, and gutsy.

She's best known for her Lana Malloy Paranormal Mystery series. Lana helps the haunted as well as the ghosts haunting them--an investigator for the unusual.

Kim lives in the Blue Ridge Mountains with her Chainsaw Artist husband and their fur babies. She has two sons and two grandsons. All boys . . . ahem, men.

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