

# SUSPICIOUS MINDS

Revenge, Betrayal, and Hidden Identity



KIM COX

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## EDITORIAL REVIEWS

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"5 Stars!...*Suspicious Minds* by Kim Cox is a fun and suspenseful read. Ryan Donatelli is out to avenge his sister's death at the hands of a well known crime boss, while Natalie Southard is trying to keep her family's company out of that crime boss's hands. When Natalie's father is murdered, she and Ryan have to work together to achieve their goals, while trying to resist the growing attraction between them. Cox writes a thrilling story that keeps you turning the pages until *The End*." -Elizabeth Delisi, author of *Since All Is Passing*, *Lady of the Two Lands*, and *The Lottie Baldwin Mysteries*

"4½ Stars!...From the intriguing Prologue, to the very end, *Suspicious Minds* is a captivating read from a fresh new author...A fast-paced, well-written Romantic Suspense, Ms. Cox has come up with a winner. I recommend *Suspicious Minds* without hesitation...Kim Cox is an author to watch.--Judy Gill

"On reading the prologue of this book, set in a morgue, I immediately knew I was in for an intriguing read. I was not disappointed...A fast moving, suspenseful, and romantic novel. Ms. Cox has done an excellent job of giving each of her characters, including Sam Southard, rich, detailed personalities, so that all of their motivations felt real to me, even when I didn't agree with them. Readers looking for a good suspense novel and tender yet passionate love story combined in one book, need look no further..."--Mary Lynn, Myshelf.com

"Debut author Kim Cox dishes up a thrilling romantic suspense that will at times, have you biting your nails...This book is so nerve racking at points because dealing with the Mafia can mean death to any that cross them, and Ryan and Natalie have some hair-raising scares in store for them. There is an excellent cast of supporting characters who add depth and excitement to this fast-paced romantic thriller. Excellent writing by a gifted new writer."--Suzanne Coleburn, Reader to Reader Reviews

"...An apt title for this fast-paced romantic suspense...Ms. Cox has created a highly suspenseful, action-packed tale with plenty of romance to satisfy those of us who like well-written and enjoyable reads. Give *Suspicious Minds* a try."--Astrid Kinn, Romance Reviews Today

"...Filled with interesting characters and a few twists. It keeps the reader on the edge of their seat wondering what is coming next. Natalie and Ryan are great characters that have to trust each other, including their attraction for each other. The action is fast-paced, giving the reader a conclusion that is not expected."--Hattie Boyd, Writer's Club Romance Group

"...Exciting down to the last word. A wonderful, suspenseful read."--Faith V. Smith, Romantic Times Magazine

"4½ Daggers...This is an action-packed read with no time to catch a breath, no place to lay the book aside. There isn't a page you can afford not to turn. All the characters are vivid and alive. The plot is tight and engrossing. The ending is spectacular."--Lyn Lawrence, All About Murder

"4 Stars!...This one has a strong plot that keeps the reader guessing. It is packed to the brim with danger, betrayal, and excitement! This novel will not disappoint! Recommended!"--Debra Fitch, *Huntress Reviews*

"5 Stars!...Will keep you reading right to the end. Kim Cox's characters are so well developed that you feel like you know them. The plot contains enough red herrings and spine-tingling chills to keep you rooted in the story." – Cathy Gladstone, *Simegen.com*

"Intense...wove a bewitching spell over me that kept me reading into the wee morning hours."-- Elaine Hopper, *Knowbetter.com*

"...A romantic suspense story of great intensity. Cox injects moments of passion, humor and terror at all the appropriate moments, giving the story a magnetic flow."--Kathryn's *Mystery Women Reviews*

"*Suspicious Minds* to this reviewer was truly a romantic suspense to read about and enjoy from the beginning. Kim Cox weaved a tale full of lies, betrayal, murder..."--Melinda, *Loves Romances*

"A fast-paced, well-written Romantic Suspense, Ms. Cox has come up with a winner. I recommend *Suspicious Minds* without hesitation. Kim Cox is an author to watch."--Judy Gill, *Scribes World Reviews*

"Ms. Cox weaves a story with nail-biting excitement and a romance that is fun and refreshing with enough intrigue to keep you guessing right up to the end. I can't wait to read her next offering."--Susan Lanier-Graham, *The Romance Studio*

"The sides keep changing but Kim Cox writes with such clarity that we are never confused. She creates immensely likable characters and treats the reader to a plot that is anything but shallow. Much like the great Agatha Christie who wrote mysteries without divulging information too early and thus boring us for the finish, so writes Kim Cox. *Suspicious Minds* gets a huge 'OH YEAH' and five exclamation points."--Cheri L. Ahner, *Word Museum*

"Get this story, sit down and buckle yourself in for a very bumpy and fast-paced ride as these two set out to find the truth, and live to tell about it."--Lydia Funneman, *Writers Unlimited*

"*Suspicious Minds* is an intriguing read, providing the reader with several plots, which add to the complexity of the story. The characters are interesting and while not quite three-dimensional, an exciting story awaits as love and trust are explored, as well as betrayal and familial connections. It is this very premise that there are many layers to individuals, and family may never be who they appear to be, which is so fascinating about this book." -Tina, *Timeless Tales*

# COPYRIGHT

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Kim Cox Books

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# DEDICATION

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*To my critique partners  
who have suffered through revision after revision:  
Elaine H., Sher T., Liz D., Nancy L, and Sue P.*

*To my husband, Lee,  
who never stopped believing in me.*

*And to my parents  
from whom I get my stubbornness  
and determination, and who will only  
see this from heaven.*

*Last but not least,  
to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ  
for giving me the talent to  
pull this off*

# Table of Contents

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Blurb

Prologue

Chapter One

Chapter Two

Chapter Three

ROMANTIC SUSPENSE & ROMANTIC MYSTERY NOVELS

LANA MALLOY PARANORMAL MYSTERY SERIES

BOOKS BY KIM COX

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

## Blurb

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### **Betrayal. Revenge. Hidden Identity.**

Will Ryan's secret bring them together . . . or tear them apart?

When Natalie witnesses her father meeting with a well-known crime boss, she becomes suspicious. She loves her father and yearns for his approval, but she can't live with this secret.

Ryan is determined to avenge his sister's death, but when he offers to help Natalie, he doesn't count on his lust for revenge breaking her heart.

Can Natalie keep her family business out of the mafia's hands?

Will working with Natalie to out her father's mob-related dealings get Ryan closer to his sister's killer? Or will one moment force them to run for their lives and can they heal when every secret is revealed?

If you love romance with an edge-of-your-seat mystery, *Suspicious Minds* is for you.

## Prologue

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"Is that her?" Detective Walsh asked, talking around the wad of gum in his mouth.

Ryan Donatelli tugged at the neck of his old football jersey while he looked everywhere but at the body on the steel examination table. The morgue walls were closing in on him. "I don't know." Even to him, his voice sounded tiny and far off. "Shelley's small, but this woman seems much smaller. It's hard to say." The obvious resemblance struck him, but he looked for any reason he could to deny it.

"Dehydration from the burns," the gray-haired coroner said. "It changes the facial appearance."

Ryan glanced up and noticed the older man's immense nose and his astonishing resemblance to the comedian and singer, Jimmy Durante.

The detective shrugged. "Well, if you can't be sure, I guess we'll just have to — Wait a minute! What about this?" Walsh removed a small envelope from his jacket pocket and extracted a plastic bag containing a necklace that had been tagged for evidence.

Ryan's stomach spasmed. Acid scorched his throat. Every conscious thought screamed in denial, yet his trembling hand reached for the bag. Under the fluorescent

lights, the ruby pendant glowed like a hot ember. He squeezed it in his palm, trying to feel its pulsing warmth—like the warmth of Shelley's smile.

*Oh, God!* It was as cold as the body on the table.

"Are you okay?" The detective's voice was muffled.

Ryan wanted to laugh at the stupidity of the question, but at this moment, mirth was a foreign emotion to him.

With his index finger, he traced the outline of the small stone before turning it over to read the inscription he knew he would find. Unshed tears blurred his vision, but there it was. *Happy B-day, Love, R.*

"It's Shelley," he said and turned away. He could no longer deny the evident truth or hang onto the tiniest thread of hope that this was a terrible mistake.

Sweet, stubborn Shelley, his baby sister. She'd never argue politics, movies or anything mundane as the weather again. Shelley loved to challenge him. She'd made him think in new ways and consider new options. What would he do without her?



## Chapter One

--

"Al, I need a favor." Natalie Southard bit her lower lip, uncertain if she was doing the right thing. Her crazy scheme could get them both fired.

"What? Working overtime on a Friday night isn't favor enough? By the way, this report isn't due for another week. You do realize we're the only ones still working, don't you?" Alyson McCormick sighed as she leaned back into the soft, tufted leather chair, her arms and legs stretched out in front of her.

"Working on this report was just an excuse to stay busy until everyone left. Now it's time for the real favor." Natalie flipped the off switch on her computer, smiled at Alyson and walked across the plush carpet to the office door. She poked her head into the hallway and scanned its length for signs of activity. No lights shone from the dozen other offices lining the wide corridor. The only audible sound was the soft hiss of the air-conditioning.

Convinced they were indeed alone, but still cautious, Natalie closed her office door before turning back to Alyson.

"Remember what I told you about DeMarco, that investor of my father's?"

"Yes. But I still don't understand why you're suspicious. Your father's too shrewd a businessman to get involved with a scam artist."

"Like I said before – gut instinct and the media. DeMarco's been on the news and in the papers. He's been arrested for everything from illegal gambling to murder. Mark my words. He has his own agenda. I'm sure of it. I just need proof."

"But he's never been convicted." Alyson squinted. Worry lines furrowed over her dark brows. "Oh, no! You've got that look in your eyes. The 'I'm Ethel and you're Lucy' look. What harebrained scheme are you planning now?"

Natalie smiled despite the serious situation. Alyson knew her so well. "I do have a plan, but there's nothing harebrained about it. You're right about my father being shrewd. He's never accepted anyone or anything at face value. It's a safe bet he's done a background check on DeMarco and stashed the information in a file somewhere. I'm going to find that file. Tonight."

Alyson's jaw dropped. "Are you crazy? Spying on your own father?"

She knew Alyson was on the verge of giving her a strong lecture about family trust and loyalty, so Natalie jumped in to stop her. "I'm not spying on my father. Just DeMarco. Are you with me on this or not?"

"But your father told you to back off. I know we used to sneak around and do things behind our parents' backs. We're grown now. Since loyalty is a big issue around here, shouldn't we abide by it?" Alyson smoothed the wrinkles from her too-short skirt, pushing it down her thighs as far as she could. Her slim figure and petite height forced her to buy her clothes from the young miss department.

Was Natalie being fair in asking for her friend's help? Over the years, the two of them had been involved in some wild antics and spontaneous adventures, but neither of them

had ever had more serious consequences than a slap on the wrist or a tongue-lashing from an irate parent.

At best, rifling her father's private files after she had been warned to back off could have her banished from the company. At worst, if her suspicions about DeMarco proved valid, she could end up chained to a rock at the bottom of the Charles River.

It wasn't too late to send Alyson home. "In or out?"

"Okay, okay. Where do I come in?" Alyson's voice sounded weary and resigned as she pushed blonde bangs away from her eyes.

"You don't have to do much. Really." Natalie's pulse raced with apprehension. She slid her fingers along her desk's smooth edge before meeting Alyson's gaze. With a tissue, she wiped imaginary dust from her fingertips, then cleared her throat.

"I want you to stay in my office, lights out and the door ajar just far enough to view the hallway. If you see anyone coming toward father's office, dial extension 121. Let it buzz once and hang up. *Comprenez?*"

"Hey, just like a real private eye or secret agent movie. Just call me *Le Femme Nikita* from now on."

"Then you'll do it?"

"Sure, but you owe me."

"What do you want?" God only knew what Alyson would demand. It could be anything from scuba diving to bungee jumping.

"To be your maid-of-honor."

"That's jumping the gun just a bit, don't ya think?"

"Maybe, but that's what I want."

Natalie rolled her eyes. "All right."

She left Alyson at the door and continued her mission. She wasn't sure why she was tiptoeing on the sky-blue carpet. Her father owned the building, and she should be walking down the corridor like the heiress apparent. But being sneaky made everything seem eerie. Spooky, even.

## Chapter Two

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With every step, Natalie's heart pounded harder. She could almost hear each beat. Even the walls creaked, as if warning her to mind her own business.

Well, this was her business as well as her father's. The stock certificates bearing her name made it so. If it weren't for her father's overbearing ways and lack of trust in her, she wouldn't have to snoop. All her life, he had demanded to know her every move, who she went out with and what she did. How ironic that she was now the one asking those same questions of him.

At this point, she feared he was now running the business and her inheritance, into the ground. She couldn't tolerate him consorting with a mobster like DeMarco. She had to find out what their relationship amounted to—what part DeMarco played in the company. Of course, the all-powerful Sam Southard was as closed mouthed as ever about his business dealings.

She turned her head toward every sound, shifting her eyes left, then right. She finally made it to the door without making a sound. A year took less time to pass than it took to venture to her father's office. The thrill was gone, replaced by raw fear.

Reaching into her pocket, she pulled out Sam's spare set of keys—the ones she'd snatched a few days ago from a hook in the closet of his study.

Natalie's hands shook. She couldn't get the key into the hole. The keys jingled against the door. The sound surely echoed throughout the building. She steadied them with her free hand and unlocked the door. It squeaked as she pushed it—a high, unnerving sound. Had anyone been on the tenth floor, they'd have certainly heard the racket.

She shut the door lightly behind her and leaned against it. After a moment, her eyes adjusted to the moonlit room. Where should she search first?

The filing cabinet on the right side of the wall looked like as good a place to start as any. She reached for the small flashlight in her pocket but decided the moon filtering through the window provided enough brightness for her to rifle through the contents. When she pulled the drawer open, it squealed as if in pain.

*Is all this noise for real or is it in my mind?*

Natalie checked each of the files, drawer by drawer, and found nothing relating to DeMarco. Her father's desk was orderly, not covered with loose papers like hers. *Mr. Neat Freak*. Natalie preferred an environment that showed she worked for a living, instead of ordering others around as her father did.

Natalie's thoughts wandered as she methodically searched Sam's files—a task requiring only half her brain. Worse, he never gave her mother a moment's rest. He made her wait on him and clean up after him as if she were his favorite slave. And the verbal abuse he showered on the woman belittled her in every way possible. She jerked the next drawer open with too much force and it banged against the cabinet interior in protest.

*Why did she stay with him?* For that matter, why did Natalie stick around? For her inheritance? No, not that alone, though it was part of it. She wanted to protect her mother from him as best she could. There was no telling what he'd say or do should Natalie leave for good.

If it weren't for the prospect of running Southard and Southard someday, she'd take her pretty little diploma in finance to another brokerage firm. And she'd get an apartment in New York City where the real action is if she knew her mother would be safe.

She even suspected Sam of physically abusing her mother, but she couldn't prove it and Elizabeth wouldn't admit that to anyone—especially her own daughter. An occasional bruise surfaced from time to time, either covered by a thick layer of makeup, or in a spot not easily seen with a casual glance.

Natalie cleared her head of all thoughts. This wasn't the time to contemplate her dysfunctional family's problems. However, it did relieve the slight guilt she felt over her actions. She concentrated on searching the desk.

All the drawers were unlocked but one. Looking through the center drawer, she found a letter opener. Careful not to scratch the polished wood, she tried to slip the lock. No luck.

Breaking and entering wasn't her forte.

Why couldn't she get it open? The movies made it seem so easy.

Her silk blouse stuck to her underarms. Darkness suddenly cloaked her like a blanket. She jumped. Then she glanced around and over her shoulder. The sky had turned dark. Rain clouds overshadowing the moon made it impossible to see.

Natalie was reluctant to use the flashlight if she could avoid it. She searched the desktop for something else—something she could use to pick the lock.

*This idea had been nuts from the get-go.* Why hadn't Alyson stopped her?

She spread her hands out along the cool desk, feeling for anything that would help. Finally, she encountered a paperclip. She unfolded it and straightened it to its full length. Just as she put it in the keyhole, the phone buzzed. Startled, Natalie's hand shook uncontrollably, the paper clip slipped from her fingers and fell to the floor.

*Not now!* She replaced the letter opener and left the paperclip where it lay. She'd retrieve it later. Heavy footsteps stopped outside the door. Someone jiggled the knob. Panicking, Natalie looked around the room for cover.

The washroom would hide her. *No, that wouldn't be a wise move.* She guessed the intruder was Albert Lawrence, her father's vice-president.

He always snooped around and listened to the conversations of the other employees. Then she would overhear him passing on the information to Sam. When her father left town, his right-hand man took the helm and took it seriously.

What if office-spy Albert needed to use the bathroom? Even if she found a place out of sight, she would still have a view of him. At the thought of his bare bottom, a chuckle erupted from her throat. *I'm doomed!*

Natalie slipped into the closet. She closed the door just as the outer office door creaked open. Sucking in a huge breath of air, she hadn't considered her claustrophobia.

*Too late.* The darkness closed in on her. With the door shut and only a thread of light to guide her to the back of the closet, she tried to squelch her panic.

Perspiration beaded her forehead and upper lip. Since there was no way to avoid it, she gritted her teeth and ducked down behind her father's golf clubs, just in case nosy Albert decided to open the door.

Remembering the small flashlight, she retrieved it from a pocket and held her hands around it. She sighed in relief when the light splashed into the back of the closet. Thank God, it wasn't powerful enough to shine under the door. But she kept it raised high, behind her father's overcoat, just to be sure.

Her mind shifted to the contents of the small space to take her thoughts away from her enclosure. Extra shirts starched to a T and a couple of suits hung at the top of the closet. On the floor were Gucci loafers and golfing shoes. A golf bag sat on the floor in front of her. The closet smelled just like Sam's Aramis cologne.

She heard drawers open and shut. Someone else searched her father's office tonight. *Who could it be?* Not Albert—he was privy to all his boss's secrets. Besides, Albert would turn on a light. No—this was someone else, someone who didn't want his activities noticed.

She couldn't stand the suspense a moment longer. She had to see what was going on.

Natalie inched forward until her right eye lined up directly with the closet door's keyhole. At first, she only saw darkness. Shifting a little more to her left, she caught glimpses of light flashing around the room.

But it wasn't enough. She had to see more. She cracked the door just enough to see him better. The weather was on her side. Moonlight once again splashed over the desk and the back of the trespasser. His silhouette only confirmed he wasn't Albert. This man was younger, more muscular, and much more graceful.

*A burglar?*

The intruder laid the flashlight atop the desk and rested it against the small crystal bowl that held assorted paperclips. Picking up the phone from its cradle, he positioned it in front of the light where he disassembled it, unscrewing the cover from the mouthpiece. Her heart pounded hard. Air caught in her lungs and a pain shot through her rib cage. Who was this intruder? Did she dare emerge from her hidey-hole to challenge him?

He reassembled the phone. Why in the world would he want to bug her father's phone? This was making less and less sense. Maybe it was one of DeMarco's men. Turning to face the closet, his light flashed into Natalie's eyes, blinding her momentarily. She dropped her keys. They hit the floor with a jingle.

He dropped his flashlight. *Oh, no!* He had to know she was there. Not moving, he appeared to listen carefully as he cocked his head to one side. She didn't dare move. She held her breath. The stranger squatted to pick up the flashlight.

Natalie gasped as he started toward the closet. When he flung open the door, the automatic bulb illuminated the small space. She jumped to full height, coming face to face with her boyfriend's bearded face.

"Thomas!"

## Chapter Three

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After the initial shock of finding Natalie hiding in the closet, he grabbed her by one arm and hauled her out.

"Thomas Randolph, let go of me right now!"

"I thought we agreed you'd call me Tom. What were you doing in there?" Keeping a hold on her, he slammed the door and pulled her toward the desk.

Natalie yanked free of his grip and tidied her blouse. "Me? This is my father's office. What are you doing here?" Her voice trembled as she walked behind the desk, distancing herself from him. With fists clenched by her sides, her mouth formed a grim line.

Ryan raked his hand through his hair and sighed inwardly. What could he say? The truth? Not now, she'd never understand. Boy, was she mad. Was that smoke coming from her nostrils?

"Well? I'm waiting for your explanation."

Imaginary fire shot from her green-eyed glare causing them to sparkle even more. *What a tiger!* It had to be a sin to look that good under any circumstances. He'd better say something or any minute she might call the cops. The cops weren't his problem, though old man Southard would be if he learned Ryan had been snooping in his office. Or Tom, as they knew him.

She folded her arms. Her breasts jiggled from the abrupt movement. The rise and fall of her chest told him she was angry. But why would she be?

He tried to hold back, but his lips tightened in defiance. Angering her further could prove to be a bad move; especially if he wanted to convince her to help him.

Finally, he opened his mouth to speak. "I'm..." He rounded the desk, closing the space between them. Without the barrier of the desk, he felt surer of himself, more charming.

Her throat moved as she swallowed and stepped back. Was he making her uneasy? He liked that. It meant they shared the same feelings. She got to him in ways he never imagined.

Then she looked up into his eyes.

It was time to act. "Me? Why were you hiding in the closet?" It was a cop-out, he knew.

She turned her back on him and walked to the window. "I'm asking the questions here."

Her reflection shone in the glass window overlooking the city. Long black hair, usually worn in a classy twist during work, now flowed around her shoulders like a silk cape. He wanted to slide his fingers through it, test its satiny softness, but he didn't dare. Not with Natalie so upset.

He followed her, looked where she looked and tried to figure out what interested her so much outside. The offices in all the neighboring buildings were dark, and the streets practically empty, indicating the lateness of the hour.

His laughter rang out into the quiet room.

She turned around as if ready to pounce. "What's so funny?"

"You. You act angry. But you're the one who hid in your father's closet. Then you demand to know my purpose for being here."

"I have my reasons. Besides, I'm Sam Southard's daughter. I have every right to be here. You don't."

His smile faded. He fingered his beard with speculation. "I'm suspicious of DeMarco." All sarcasm was now gone from his tone. Part of the truth came out at last. Lying wasn't his strong suit.

An odd, disturbed look clouded the depths of her eyes at the mention of the name. "Did you think he'd be hiding inside the phone you took apart and put back together?"

"I was checking for bugs." His body tensed. Had he answered too quickly?

"Why would DeMarco bug..." She furrowed her brows.

"Nat, I've done research. DeMarco's one bad dude. If he has any interest in Southard and Southard, you can bet he's got some way of knowing everything that's going on. Money is the most important thing to this man. He'll stop at nothing to get it, then control it."

"So? Was there?"

"Was there what?"

"Was there a bug?"

"Yes." He had to tell the truth. If he said no and she checked the phone after he left, she'd know he lied. And she would think he put the bug there. Which he did, but Nat didn't have to know that.

"Did you take it out?"

"No. If I do, he'll know someone's onto him. But there's another possibility, too."

"And that is?"

When he placed his hands on her upper arms, a heated blush crept across her cheeks. She tried to wiggle free. "Look at me," he said, lifting her chin with the tip of his finger. "He probably has an informant, a plant, working here."

He clenched his jaw at the apparent lack of concern on her face. When she turned away from him, his hand froze in mid-air, still warm from where he'd held her chin.

Natalie sauntered closer to the window and ran a finger along the cold edge of its frame.

A chill ran down his spine as a new fear coursed through his veins. Could she be in on everything with her father and DeMarco? After all, this was a family business. Sam had probably taught his daughter ruthlessness from the cradle.

If that were true, the circumstances would become much more dangerous. He would be alone in his pursuit. Though he'd started out using her for his own gain, had he been the one being used all along?

She faced him again. "I appreciate your help. But this is my problem, not yours. I don't need your help."

She came off as tough, but was she? Suddenly, he wanted to break down the barriers she was building. He wanted to possess her and prove she was on his side.

"Your problem is mine." His arms slipped around her slender waist and pulled her to him. His head slanted downward, his lips spreading. She inhaled a deep breath as her lips parted, inviting him to follow through.

"No!" Without warning, Natalie pushed against his chest with a force that made him take a step backward. Concern etched her eyes. "I can take care of myself. After all, I'm a Southard. My father has taught me well."

Wasn't that a clue? Although she pretended to be against DeMarco, it sounded more and more like she wanted all the power he could give her.

"I'm sure he has, honey. But this is a totally different ball game. You don't know what you're getting yourself into." *Or did she?*

She smiled. An eyebrow lifted. "I get it now. You think if you unearth the truth, show Sam just how DeMarco's taking advantage of him, you can take all the credit. And in my father's eyes, you'll be the company's savior, his golden boy."

"You've got it all wrong."

"Do I now?" She licked her lips and continued her attack. "I've seen how you cozy up to old Sam – at his beck and call. He rates you up there with the son he never had. The superhero of this company."

"You don't mean that."

"No? I've suspected you from that first day when you charmed yourself into a job here."

"Last night, when you told me how concerned you were... Well, I wanted to help. Thought I'd come over here and try to find some information that would help you. At least now you know the phone is bugged."

"I'd eventually found that myself if you hadn't interrupted me. Look, Tom, you're a broker just like I am, not a cop. There's nothing more you can do that I can't."

"But I'm..." he began, then stopped. The truth would only put a bigger wedge between them. And he didn't want that. Not yet. At least, not until he found out exactly whose side she was on.

Yes, he needed to stay close to her. Whether she was in it up to her slender, sexy neck or after DeMarco's hide didn't matter. Either side she chose could lead him to what he needed to know.

"What? I know you weren't going to say the difference is that you're a man." She laughed. "You really need to come up with a better reason than that."

"That's not what I was going to say." *If she only knew.* Soon, he would tell her – if she proved innocent. Maybe then she would understand. But not now.

"Really? Then what? What were you going to say?"

He knew his silence only confirmed what she was saying. He thought her nothing more than a weak, little thing who needed the protection of a big, strong man. Let her think whatever she wanted. Anything was better than the truth for now.



Her jealousy act was just that – an act to distance herself from him. He would let her have her way for now.

"What's wrong?" He had to change the direction of her anger. If that meant allowing her to think of him as a chauvinist, then so be it. "You and I both know you'd do better with a man along to help keep you safe."

"You arrogant..." Natalie marched to the door and opened it. "Just leave."

He pivoted to go but turned again to face her. "I'll leave for now. Let me know when you're ready to listen to reason."

## ROMANTIC SUSPENSE & ROMANTIC MYSTERY NOVELS

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In *Suspicious Minds*, Natalie Southard is trying to keep her family business out of the hands of a known crime boss, Nick DeMarco. Ryan Donatelli is out to avenge the death of his sister, and he's not above using Natalie to do it. [Read More](#) | [Excerpt](#)

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In *For the Love of Money*, Alan can't accept his best friend's death as an accident. He knows the winding roads of Bear's Hollow like the back of his hand and is convinced foul play was involved. As Chief Jessie Kendall investigates, she finds herself drawn to Alan despite mounting evidence against him and the victim's widow. Will she be able to uncover the truth before it's too late? [Read More](#) | [Excerpt](#)

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In *All This Time* (Book 1) in the *Style & Profile Series*, Jenny Morgan feels her best friend, Trevor Drake lacks ambition except when it comes to chasing women. He thinks she takes life too seriously and needs to learn to relax. Can they get it together while uncovering a common enemy who is determined to ruin their business and their life. [Read More](#) | [Excerpt](#)

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In *Before We Wed*, (Book 2) in the *Style & Profile Series*, Sara Martin and Jon Clayton are about to say their wedding vows when the police charge in and arrest Jon. Is Jon innocent? Are there more sinister people involved? Will Sara find the evidence she needs to clear him, or will she find out he's fooled them all? If someone else is framing Jon, who is it and what are their motives? [Read More](#) | [Excerpt](#)

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In *Crime and Justice*, (Book 3) of the *Style & Profile Series*, Lynsi, a skilled researcher and Managing Editor at Style & Profile Men's Magazine, desires to start a family with her partner, but she wonders if it will ever happen. Jaxon, a committed lawyer who prioritizes work over everything else, inadvertently puts their relationship at risk when they work together on a cold case to obtain a new trial for a convicted spouse, leading to a dangerous chain of events that may prove fatal.

In *Duty or Truth*, (Book 4) of the *Style & Profile Series*, Kara, a widowed mother of a teenage daughter, has always struggled with the loss of her husband, Jeremy, who was killed in action in Afghanistan. When her late husband's best friend and godfather to her daughter, Ian McCray, returns to Larch Rise as a detective with the local police department, old wounds are reopened.

# LANA MALLOY PARANORMAL MYSTERY SERIES

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In the *Lana Malloy Paranormal Mystery Series*, Lana Malloy is a psychic, private investigator who is on a mission to help the dearly departed even when they don't realize they need help.

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In *The Wedding Crasher* (Book 3), when Lana Malloy is about to marry Tony Calabria, she has a dream of her wedding that is troubling, and she wonders if she could call it off. With the help of her Great Aunt Lucy, she realizes the vision isn't about her own wedding but that of someone else who will be forced to marry or worse. During their honeymoon, Lana's visions become clearer and now Lana and Tony are faced with finding and rescuing Jada from a madman. [Read More](#) | [Excerpt](#)

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In *Christmas Cruise* (Book 4), Lana boards a cruise ship haunted by dead women who were brutally murdered. While aboard the ship Lana has an experience that mentally injures her. Once she recovers, she's more determined than ever to find the killer. [Read More](#) | [Excerpt](#)

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In *Haunted by Her Past* (Book 5), Lana and Demi team up to support Jena. Abused and scared, Jena runs away only to be haunted by her abuser. He's worse dead than he was when he was alive. [Read More](#) | [Excerpt](#)

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## BOOKS BY KIM COX

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All For Love

Love Conquers All

*Collections*

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Wandering Spirits II

Dream, Conquer, & Love



## 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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