



Karen
KINGSBURY
Family



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CHAPTER ONE



KATY HART couldn't find her way to daylight, couldn't draw herself from the strange deep sleep that held her in its grip.

She was holding Dayne Matthews' hand, lost in the feel of his skin against hers. But something wasn't right. Dayne felt more like a stranger than a friend, and even though the sun had set, the sand beneath them felt hot. Too hot. Dayne was looking at her, losing himself in her eyes, making her forget how strange it was to be sitting on a private beach in Los Angeles next to one of Hollywood's biggest heartthrobs, and he was saying, "I never planned on being a star."

The air grew colder, and snowflakes mixed in the wind. Snowflakes big enough to hold in her hands, with designs and intricacies that took her breath away. Dayne was saying it was time; they should get going, get her back to the hotel.

When they stood, the snow disappeared and sand stretched out as far as they could see. Sand and a large clump of dense bushes, and suddenly there was a click. And another. Four more. Dozens at the same time. Cameras. Everywhere she

looked there were cameras and lots of people. Thousands of people, all of them whispering, *This is the price for fame . . . the price for fame . . . the price for fame. . . .* And Dayne was leading her toward the bushes, closer . . . closer.

In a rush of motion a yellow-haired woman jumped from the clump of green and grabbed Katy from behind, holding her by the arms.

Katy screamed, loud and shrill, but before Dayne could do anything to help, the woman whipped out a knife. No, not a knife, a sword. A long, curved sword.

“Don’t move or I’ll kill you,” the woman hissed at Katy. She pressed the blade hard against Katy’s throat. Harder and harder still, until Katy couldn’t swallow or yell for help or utter even the slightest whisper.

Dayne . . . she wanted to shout at him, but she couldn’t. *Dayne, help me!* Katy’s body trembled and stiffened.

And he was coming closer, closer. He didn’t speak, but his expression said he wanted to help Katy, was desperate to help her.

If only Katy could catch her breath. But the blade pressed even tighter against her throat, tight enough that her windpipe was closing off. *Stay back, Dayne! She’s going to kill me. . . . I can feel the knife on my throat.* The words built in her mind, her heart, but she couldn’t speak them, couldn’t squeeze them past the pressure of the shiny blade.

“Hussy!” the hissing voice spat at Katy’s cheek. “You’ll feel the knife more than that in a few minutes.”

Dayne was whispering something, and suddenly a yellow Honda Civic came tearing down the sand straight for them, its engine revving louder, louder as it came.

Behind her, Katy could feel the woman’s anger turn to rage, sense her shaking with hatred.

Dayne reached out his hand, but something sliced down the length of her arm and blood began to drip down her fingers.

Dear God, where are You? Help me, please! Dayne . . . she's going to kill me! Her screams echoed in her soul and clambered for a way out, but there was none.

The people with cameras grew in number, *clicking, clicking, clicking*. Every lens focused directly on Katy. There were so many now that Katy couldn't see past them or around them. They formed a tight circle, and inside the circle the drama continued to escalate.

That's when it happened. The waves grew still. Utterly still. Katy felt the insane woman lower the knife a few inches. Dayne was running toward them in slow motion, but it was as fast as he could go, and Katy knew—she knew with every heartbeat—that he wouldn't reach her in time. The cameras caught every step, every movement. The clicking grew louder . . . louder than her own heartbeat. Dayne kicked the knife with all his strength, and it went flying and became a seagull, squawking and flapping its wings and soaring fast and far over the Pacific Ocean.

Dayne landed hard against the woman, knocking her to the ground and planting himself firmly on her back. The yellow Honda was ten feet away, its engine howling, its presence menacing. Dayne shouted, "Run, Katy . . . run for your life."

But it was too late. The woman's eyes became dark and flinty. The seagull fell from the sky and became a knife once more, and the witch grabbed it and plunged it straight into—

"Ma'am." The voice was calm, kind.

Katy felt something cold against her face, and she jolted back from it. She blinked twice, and everything disappeared—the woman, the knife, even Dayne. She wasn't on a beach, on the hot sand, or being attacked by a witch with a sword. The cold against her cheek was the window of the 757.

"Ma'am, you need to put your seat up." The voice belonged to a flight attendant.

Katy looked past the two businessmen in the seats beside her

to the flight attendant. She felt a rush of heat in her cheeks. “I’m sorry. I . . . I was asleep.”

“That’s fine.” The woman gave her a polite smile. “I just need you to put your seat back up.”

“Yes . . . okay.” She did as she was told, and only then did she realize that she was out of breath, the palms of her hands damp and clammy. She blew the air from her lungs. *Relax, Katy . . . relax.*

The entire ordeal had only been a dream—a dream that, except for the snow and the wild driverless Honda Civic, was exactly what had happened a year earlier.

Katy felt her heart rate slow, felt her breathing even out. Everything was going to be okay. The trial against the insane fan was set for this week, and Dayne had warned her that the media scrutiny would be intense. But she would survive it. Her testimony wouldn’t take more than a day or so on the witness stand. Maybe less.

She looked out the window, through the smoggy sunset, and in the time it took her to inhale she was back again. Back to the week when she had actually considered taking a starring role opposite Dayne Matthews. There on the beach, walking hand in hand with Dayne, the ocean breeze stirring her hair and her senses. The reality was as wild a scenario as the nightmare she’d just woken from.

Katy shuddered. She brought her fingers to her throat and lightly massaged the place where the knife had pressed against her all those terrifying minutes. The blade had left lines on her that she had had to cover with makeup for two weeks.

The stalker would’ve killed her. If Dayne hadn’t caught her off guard, Katy wouldn’t be on the plane now, wouldn’t be on her way to testify. She’d merely be another Los Angeles homicide statistic. Goose bumps rose on her arms. How long had the woman been watching them that night? Using two voices, two personalities, she was both Chloe and Anna during those fright-

ening minutes, but the police had told them her real name since then.

Margie Madden.

The moment Dayne had thrown himself on Margie, Katy pulled herself free. In the seconds after that, Dayne made a mistake that nearly cost him his life. Katy had watched it happen, watched him twist around and find her, shouting for her to call 911, his eyes desperate to know if she was okay. And in the time it took him to do that, Margie had grabbed the knife and reached back. She raised it, intent on sinking the blade into Dayne.

Katy felt sick as she relived the scene. The knife glistened in the moonlight, and she screamed his name. Just in time, Dayne whipped around, and in quick, fluid movements, he kicked the knife out of Margie's hand and wrenched her away from Katy. Only then was Katy sure that they were out of danger.

Even as Dayne held the attacker facedown on the ground, the woman continued to spout death threats. *"I'll have to kill you too, Dayne . . . have to kill you too. . . ."*

Katy inhaled and settled back against the seat. Enough. She'd have to relive the terror on the witness stand in a couple days. No sense making herself sick by replaying it now. She turned toward the window. The setting sun shone a brilliant splash of light against her side of the plane, and the warmth felt good.

Temperatures in the nineties were forecast for LA. Katy wore a white sleeveless blouse and jeans. Absently, she turned her left arm so she could see the fine scar, the single threadlike line that ran three inches along her upper arm. The place where Margie had cut her, proving that she was willing to use the knife, anxious to kill.

The dream was no surprise. It was the same one she'd had three times in the past two weeks. In the daylight, during long conversations with Jenny and Jim Flanigan—the couple whose house she lived in—she was ready to face the trial straight-on. So what if she had to look Margie Madden in the eyes and testify

against her? Never mind that she would have to relive the attack in front of a jury and a sea of media members from around the world.

Margie was behind bars, where she most certainly would stay. Nothing about the woman was a threat; at least that's what Katy told herself. But her nightmares betrayed her confidence. And the cameras—there were always cameras—reminded her that another danger lay just ahead. A danger that threatened her privacy, every bit as much as Margie had threatened her life.

The danger of the paparazzi.

Once the trial began tomorrow morning, they would be out for every morsel of story they could find. Most certainly they would learn her identity, and it would be nothing for them to figure out that she—Katy Hart, small-town Christian drama instructor—was the mystery woman who had kissed Dayne Matthews on the beach just moments before the attack.

Katy stared at the city, at the mountains that framed the San Fernando Valley. Back home her theater group was headlong into rehearsals for *Narnia*—the Christian Kids Theater production that would close out their season. Rhonda Sanders, Katy's friend and choreographer, would take over supervising the kids, keeping things on track until she returned. Good thing. The show was set to open the first week of June—in just one month.

A ripple of fear tightened her stomach. What would her reputation be by then?

Dayne had already reminded her two days ago when they last talked that they had to steer clear of the press as much as possible. “We can't be seen together outside court, Katy. Your reputation is on the line.”

She had mulled that over. “Wouldn't it be normal for us to be together like that?” The whole media game was still so new to her. She had tightened her grip on the phone and tried to understand. “As long as they don't think I'm the one you kissed, couldn't we be okay?”

“My new agent’s working on that. He’s talking to my attorney Joe Morris.” Dayne gave a sad chuckle. “The agent’s been busy all week coming up with a plausible story to tell the press. Something they might believe so we can keep the spotlight off you.”

Not that any story would really work. Once Katy took the witness stand sometime this week, the entire truth was bound to come out. The reason she had been on the beach with Dayne, what they had been discussing, and what they’d been doing prior to the attack. The prosecuting attorney had promised to object any time a question came up that didn’t pertain directly to the attack. But still . . .

She narrowed her eyes and stared at the sea of homes and roadways spread out below her. *God, go with me, please. Let me keep my privacy, my reputation. I need Your protection, Lord.*

There was no answer, no soft whispering in her soul. But two verses from the book of Matthew came to mind. “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

Katy let the words roll around in her heart, soothing her fears, removing the images of a thousand cameras trained on her. Rest for her soul. Yes, that’s exactly what she wanted to take with her as she stepped off the plane in Burbank. If she allowed God to give her rest and peace, then her time in California would go quickly and without incident.

But what about the other part of the passage? “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.” What did that mean? Was it a matter of putting God first, the way she’d tried to do since she met Dayne Matthews? And how would that affect their downtime this week? Especially in light of how she and Dayne had grown closer over the last few weeks.

They had talked on the phone nearly every night lately. He spoke about his newfound faith, his determination that he would live out his days the way his adoptive parents had, the

way his biological family apparently still did. He was reading his Bible and growing, sharing bits of discovered truth every time they spoke.

“I read something today,” he told her last time they talked. “The Bible says our bodies are not our own. We were bought with a price.” He’d stopped for a moment. “It makes me sick, Katy. All those years when I did whatever I wanted, slept with whoever wound up in my bed. No wonder I felt like something was missing.” His tone grew soft, thoughtful. “Sometimes I can’t believe God could ever love someone like me.”

Katy had refused the strange jealousies his confession stirred in her. Instead she closed her eyes and told him what he needed to hear. “God’s forgiven you. Don’t ever forget that.”

Their conversations were deep and meaningful, bouncing between serious discussions about God and silly, fun talk about the upcoming CKT performance of *Narnia*.

“How do you feel about taking a breather from Hollywood and playing Aslan the lion?” she’d asked him a week ago. “For the life of me, I can’t get my lion to roar. He’s just a nice big kid, happy to be there. Like Gomer Pyle wandering around the stage yucking it up and aw-shucking it with every other character.”

Dayne laughed. “Sounds a lot better than my recent gig.”

Something was changing between them, strengthening their friendship and making them both dizzy with possibilities. On the good days, anyway.

On the bad ones, Katy would go to the local market and pick up a tabloid. Always there was something about Dayne—if not on the cover, then inside. Rumors about who he was seeing and who was falling for him, talk about a mystery woman meeting him at the beach or driving with him along Pacific Coast Highway. She wanted to believe that maybe the woman they were referring to was her. But she had her doubts. After all, she hadn’t been back to Hollywood since January.

Katy never mentioned what she read. But it made her think. Whatever was happening between them couldn't possibly turn into a normal relationship, the kind that her friends Ashley Baxter Blake and Jenny had with their husbands.

Even so, their recent conversations were wonderful.

"You won't believe what happened," he told her. The emotion in his voice was raw. "I met my birth father. Sat down on a bench beside him and talked with him for an hour." He paused. "You're the only one I've told."

Dayne still didn't mention the man's name, where he was from, or any of the details, but the difference in him after that was undeniable. He seemed stronger, with a confidence that came less from who he was than what he was becoming on the inside. A confidence that grew from somewhere inside his soul. Between the news about his birth father and Dayne's growing faith, Katy considered the changes nothing short of divine, the sort of work only God could've brought about.

She had shared the details with Rhonda and Jenny, and she wanted to share them with Ashley. All three of her friends had been praying and for the most part gently suggesting that Dayne couldn't possibly be the right person for her. But now . . . now even Jenny was beginning to wonder.

There were issues to be resolved, of course. The greatest were the paparazzi and the fact that Dayne needed to stay in LA until he finished his current contract—five more movies with the studio backing him. Katy had no idea how either of them could survive being apart that long, not if their recent conversations were any indication.

The simple fact was this: the longer he talked to her, the more he shared about how God was working in his life and how he was taking walks along the beach every morning praying for her, the more there was no denying her feelings.

She was falling for him harder than ever before.



The plane landed, and Katy gathered her bags and rented a car. She could hardly wait to see Dayne. It had been two months since they'd been together.

She checked into her hotel and waited until the right time. According to Dayne, the paparazzi had been quieter lately. He wasn't hitting the nightclubs, wasn't showing up at the usual restaurants and haunts.

"My old agent told me this would happen," Dayne had told her on the phone last night. "He said photographers stay away from Christians."

"But do they know?"

"I'm not sure." He paused. "Maybe it's something they sense. I'm being too well-behaved. Not that they've lost all interest. They're still taking a hundred pictures of me every day."

"A hundred?" The thought was more than Katy could comprehend.

He chuckled. "Down from a thousand."

Katy had been tempted to say something about the tabloid rumors she'd seen, but she kept her thoughts to herself. He owed her nothing. If it was true about the time he spent with other women, with his leading ladies and supporting actresses, then she prayed that God would show her. That way she could share a friendly week with Dayne and let him go—for good this time.

Until then she had to believe the tabloids didn't know what she knew, that Dayne was becoming someone they wouldn't even recognize. And tonight she would see those changes firsthand.

Dayne had asked her to meet him at the beach. It would be safe, he said, because the photographers hadn't been lurking in the bushes near his Malibu house as often, and he thought they could escape the paparazzi easier tonight than after the trial started. They wouldn't know about her until tomorrow, and

they wouldn't know the details until she testified Tuesday or Wednesday. At this point the paparazzi had no idea who she was.

"Besides, we need to talk about that, about how you're going to handle them," Dayne had said. "You need a plan, Katy."

Now that the trial was only twelve hours away she believed him more than ever.

The weather was warm as she headed to the beach in her rental car that evening. She had changed into capris and a form-fitting tank top under a pale blue, long-sleeve blouse, the kind that tapered in at the waist.

Twenty minutes later she found a spot in the parking lot at Malibu Beach, not far from where the paparazzi had tried to catch her last time she was here. She looked around the way Dayne had told her to—in case there were transients or photographers, anyone who appeared suspicious. In that case, she was supposed to drive down the road and pull into his driveway. He would open his garage, and she could park inside. But if the paparazzi saw her, they wouldn't be able to go out on the beach. The photographers would be desperate to know the identity of Dayne's visitor.

Okay, she told herself, *don't be nervous*. They were just a couple of friends getting together to talk. But no matter what she told herself, as she stepped out of her car, the truth was as clear as the hint of perfume she left behind her.

Katy moved quickly, glancing around. People were scattered across the parking lot, loading beach chairs into the backs of cars and packing up for the day. A few surfers washed their boards beneath the outdoor showers along the bathroom building. But no one was watching her. She reached the sand and surveyed the beach. The shoreline wasn't as empty as it had been in January. A few families played near the surf, and an occasional couple sat together, facing the sea.

The sand felt warm as it pushed over her sandals and between

her toes. She wished she could stop and take them off, but Dayne had told her to keep walking. She reached the damp shore where the sand was more compact, and she turned left. She was maybe ten yards into her walk when a guy hurried down the sandy slope toward her.

Just as she was about to pick up her pace, the man spoke in a loud whisper. "Katy . . . it's me." Dayne appeared from the shadows and fell into step beside her. "Keep walking."

The feel of him next to her heightened her awareness, made her notice everything about him, how tall and strong he was beside her and how good it felt when their arms brushed against each other every few steps. "Are they out, the photographers?" She tried to keep her eyes straight ahead, but she couldn't help catching glimpses of him. Strange how being with Dayne in public was like playing a role, like reenacting the scene the two of them had rehearsed for *Dream On* almost a year ago.

"No." He gave her a quick grin. "But I couldn't let you walk the beach by yourself. The beaches are busier this time of year." He slipped his hands into his shorts pockets and kept moving. "I watched you park, made sure you were okay." He looked over his shoulder. "I'm not taking chances with the paparazzi."

"Oh." She kept her voice low, but she allowed a glance in his direction. "I'm glad."

They kept a steady pace, and after a few minutes Dayne slowed. They came to a stop a few yards from the stairs leading up to his house. He scanned the darkening beach in both directions, then turned and faced the surf. There were no signs of people anywhere near them. He took a deep breath and smiled at her. "I think we're alone."

She kicked off her sandals. "Mmmm. The sand feels so good."

He met her eyes and then looked back at the moonlit surf. "Not as good as seeing you."

He was keeping his distance on purpose; Katy could feel that

much. The threat of photographers ruled everything about his public moments.

She breathed in the salty ocean air and worked her toes deeper into the sand. “I can’t believe I’m here.” She angled her face, finding his eyes again. “Something about you is different.”

“Different?” He grinned and kicked a bit of sand at her foot.

“In a nice way.” She straightened and let the breeze wash over her. Everything about the ocean felt wonderful, especially after a day in an airplane. “I think it’s your eyes.” She felt shy telling him this. “It’s like I can see Jesus there.”

“Really?”

“Yeah.” She stared at the surf. Her heart was pounding harder than the waves. Over the phone she had felt things changing for both of them, growing deeper, stronger. But here . . . in person, the force of the attraction between them was enough to knock her to her knees. It was all she could do to hold her ground.

For nearly a minute he said nothing, just stood beside her, the ocean wind washing over them, their elbows touching. Then he groaned. “I can’t stand this.”

He didn’t have to explain what he meant. Katy felt it too. Being together this way and not at least hugging wasn’t natural. She breathed out, tried to steady herself; then she lifted her eyes to him.

At the same time, he turned and faced her. “Katy . . .” He reached for her hands, wove his fingers between hers, and once more—very carefully—he looked around. Then he did what they were both dying to do. He slipped his arms around her waist and drew her into his embrace. “I feel like I’ve waited forever for this.” He brushed his cheek against hers. “I’ve missed you so much.”

Her hands wound around his neck, and she let herself get lost in his eyes. They shone with a love that could only have come from God. Mixed with the hint of moonlight reflecting off the water, the nearness of him was more than she could take. She let

herself be pulled in closer, and she rested her head against his chest. “Why is it—” she looked up and let the light from his eyes wash over her—“I never feel complete until I’m in your arms?”

At first he looked as if he might answer her, but in the time it took him to blink, the air between them changed. He brought his hands to her face, and with the most tender care he touched his lips to hers.

But just as the kiss began, just as she was remembering how wonderful it felt to be in his arms, there was a movement in the bushes, a rush of feet, and the clicking of cameras.

Fear and adrenaline mixed and flooded her veins.

In a blur of motion, two men appeared from behind the bushes beneath Dayne’s home—one of them the same as last time she was here, the other one much younger.

Katy held up her hand, but it was too late.

The men blocked their way to Dayne’s staircase and began taking rapid-fire pictures.

“Put your hand down,” Dayne whispered to her. He used his body to shelter her, pulling her close, wrapping his arm around her, as he hurried her around the photographers to the door that led to his stairs.

The cameras didn’t stop clicking until Dayne and Katy were inside the private staircase. Even then the men banged on the seven-foot-high gate. One of them shouted, “Tell us her name! Come on, Matthews. She’s not an actress. Just tell us who she is.”

The other one chimed in. “She’s the mystery woman, right? The one who’ll be at the trial tomorrow?”

Only then did Katy fully realize what had happened. The paparazzi had figured it out. All along she really had been the mystery woman. The photographers were desperate for the identity of the woman Dayne had been with back in January, and in the process they’d kept the story alive. They might not know her name—not yet. But the pictures they’d taken tonight would

show her entire body—her face and her surprise—and the fact that she had been locked in an embrace with Dayne Matthews.

And that could mean only one thing: Life as she had known it was about to come to an end.