

# *Eleven Days: An Unexpected Love*

By  
Lora Lindy

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Books by Lora Lindy

## **Series**

Days Trilogy (Romantic/Crime Suspense)

Eleven Days: An Unexpected Love

Thirty Days: The Hunt for Angelino Marquit

Four Days: The Revenge (September 2013)

The Party Line

Dear Reader:

As the author of this series, I wanted to inform you about the storyline. The storyline in book one is continued into book two. If you are a person who enjoys a great cliffhanger that continues from book to book, this novel is for you. However, some readers want closure to every book. Either way, I wanted the reader to know upfront about the cliffhanger ending. Enjoy!

Lora Lindy

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## Chapter 1

"Sharon, I've received the test results from the lab," said Dr. Kemper lowering his head, not wanting to look into her tear-filled eyes. They were swollen as though she had lost the first round of boxing with Muhammad Ali. Willingly, he distracted himself by looking at the papers he held in his hands, flipping the pages back and forth on the clipboard. He wanted to make sure he did not miss anything. No matter how many times the elderly doctor delivered grave news, it never got any easier.

Sharon's face turned pale as she looked at the doctor, waiting for him to continue about the news of her husband James. She could tell by the look on his face the news would be heartbreaking. Her heart started racing as she shifted from one foot to the other. When he didn't finish his sentence, she snapped at him. "Spit it out, what are the results?"

He took a deep breath, and as he exhaled his cheeks puffed out. "The MRI shows James is brain dead, and there's nothing medically we can do. The machine is breathing for him and it is the only thing keeping him alive. Too much time had passed after his heart attack, and his brain was deprived of oxygen. I'm sorry Sharon. I wish I could give you better news."

"I do too." Sharon lowered her eyes to her beloved husband. Thoughts of him raced through her mind. She recalled when they met, their first date, their marriage, and the birth of their children. As she remembered the birth of their first child, Kismet, tears began to flow. Kismet's head came out pointed and lopsided, causing James to say, "Look he's an alien. Honey, is there something you want to tell me?" The doctor laughed for ten minutes.

Dr. Kemper coughed, and Sharon snapped back to reality. "You will need to decide when you want to turn off the machine. I'm sure you'll need to talk with family about the details. Also, you'll need to let the family know so they can come say goodbye." This was the part he hated the most, when the loved ones discussed what should be done—they never agreed. Some didn't want him to suffer, and some wanted him hooked up to the machine forever.

"Do you mind if I think about all this information?" She needed time alone to think. Picking the day and time to let her husband die was not a choice she wanted to make, tired or not. Thoughts raced through Sharon's mind about the sorrow this decision would cause, especially for Lana. Cousins or not, they had been best friends for decades. Now in a fleeting moment, his life would end. This decision would be a crushing blow to her and all the family.

"Absolutely, you take all the time you need. I'll come by in the morning to check on you and answer any questions you might have."

"Thank you." Sharon picked up her coat and kissed James' cheek. "Good night doctor. I'll see you in the morning." The last few days with only a few hours of sleep had caught up with her. Knowing her own body—she needed rest. Without rest, she might doubt any decision she made.

"I guess I'll say goodnight, and I want you to try to get a decent night's sleep." He was never shocked by how distraught spouses acted. Some would scream at the top of their lungs, and others would laugh. Most cried and were afraid to make any decisions, letting the doctor spoon-feed them through the process. Sharon appeared to be the quiet type and always wanted to be alone to think about what to do next.

They both walked out of the hospital room without saying another word, but she did glance back at her husband one last time.

## Chapter 2

Forty-seven-year-old Lana Andrews sat in a hard orange chair in the hallway of Citizens Memorial Hospital, waiting to say goodbye to her cousin. His unexpected heart attack had disarranged her entire life, everyone's lives. All the loved ones took turns entering his room to say goodbye. Some would go in alone, and others went in groups. Lana wanted to be alone with James when she said her last fair well.

While waiting for the immediate family to arrive, she reminisced how James had always been at her side. He had helped her get through her rough divorce, helped her move, went to court with her, and even went head-to-head with her ex. No matter what happened in her life, he always stood by his cousin's side. She looked down at the tile floor and the pit of her stomach hurt—dreading the next hour.

The last person left James' death room. Lana took a deep breath and walked in, trembling. Her hands shook as she reached down and took his limp hand. She spoke with a soft tone, a whisper, "James, I know you can't hear me, but I need to say goodbye. I love you so much, and I will miss you. I will miss your guidance, love, and talks. If I could give you my heart to make you strong, I would. I'm sorry I wasn't there for you when you needed me most." She choked up for a few seconds then finally murmured one last word. "Goodbye." Lana reached down and kissed his cold cheek. She looked into his cadaverous face, hoping for some telltale sign of life, but nothing.

She took the sleeve of her sweater and wiped the tears away as she looked around the room. Instead of a typical hospital room, it looked more like a Martha Stewart home with all the beautiful colors. The furniture had been stained with a dark mahogany color, and the bedspread and walls were different shades of green. But what stood out the most were the wall hangings. To her surprise, they were happy pictures of trees and flowers. *Are they trying to put me in a good mood?* This would be James' death room, and she didn't want to forget a thing. Nor did she want it to remind her of a happy ending.

Dr. Kemper and his nurse walked in interrupting her thoughts. He looked at her with sadness and spoke, barely audible. "It's time."

Lana nodded, but her heart denied the reality of it all. All the close loved ones shuffled into the room—one by one they gathered around James. Nobody seemed to want to touch him, so Lana held his hand, shaking. She alone held his hand. As the doctor pushed the button, the beeping slowed down until it flatlined. She expected him to jerk, fight to live. But, he didn't. He just slowly drifted away. His heart stopped, her heart pounded as his last heartbeat slipped from his lifeless body. She took a deep breath as his final heartbeats streamed from his fingers into hers. *Oh my Lord, I can't let go, I just can't!* Suddenly, her heart felt heavy with sorrow.

"Come on Lana, you have to let go. You know that is what he would want," said Sharon consolingly.

How dare she ask Lana to let go of his hand? Sharon didn't even attempt to hold his hand the last few seconds of his life. Lana hated her, she hated the doctor, and she even hated James. How dare he die and leave them all—he had no right to die. Lana wanted to talk with him one more time. It was all she could do to hold back her anger. "It's so hard," she said with curtness, not wanting to look at Sharon. How could she have signed that paper? Her emotions overtook rational thinking.

Lana knew she shouldn't be hard on her because James had been brain dead for several days. They all loved him so much, and that made it even more difficult. Her mind was in a state of reckless emotions.

The doctor pronounced him dead, and the nurse wrote down the details of time, cause of death and date.

That's it.

It's over—just like that.

Lana walked out the door.

## Chapter 3

When Lana walked out her front door, she realized what a sunny day it was for the funeral. The temperature in Chattanooga hovered around eighty-degrees. It was much warmer than normal, with only a slight breeze. The trees still held on to their fall leaves, and they had already turned to the bright colors: orange, red, purple, and every other color imaginable. Even with all this beauty surrounding her, all she could think about was her own sorrow. How could today be sunny when she felt the deepest and darkest hurt she had ever experienced in her life? The sun shouldn't be shining today, and she wished it would hide behind the clouds—she wished she could hide behind the clouds.

Once she arrived at the cemetery she sat in the truck a few minutes, contemplating leaving. But she couldn't leave, so she trudged on, unwillingly. She looked over at all the other graves and wondered how their families managed to get through their own tragedy. Then she saw an infant's tombstone and thought, *if this tiny baby's parents can get through this, I can too*. That one tiny tombstone gave her courage.

As she got closer to the grave, she fixated on James' casket, saddened to know his body lay in it and soon would be put in the ground. He was too young for this fate of eternity. Fifty-years-old was too young. All graves should be like New Orleans, above the ground. Hell fell below the ground, and Heaven rose above the ground. Families so freely send everyone to hell.

Thank the Lord for the chairs to sit on, or she might have collapsed. She noticed everyone around her solemnly looking like zombies. The oddest thing, what she remembered most was everyone wearing black clothing. She wondered how that tradition started. Her grandmother, a devout Pentecostal Christian, told her years ago, "Death is a celebration. Our loved ones have moved on to a better place, and that's a time to celebrate." Today of all days she thought of that and wondered. *If death is such a celebration then why don't we wear party hats and party clothes to funerals instead of black?*

Sharon interrupted her thoughts by putting her hand on Lana's and leaned in to whisper, "Look at the view James will have forever." In the distance, the beauty of Lookout Mountain was breathtaking, and James would have loved the view. The sun smiled on the sheets of multi-colored leaves made more vibrant by the wet summer.

Lana knew any other day she might have been totally contented looking at the mountain, but not today. She nodded, knowing how much he loved the mountains. "He would love this place," Lana whispered.

The deep gray casket sparkled with the sun shining on it. She thought he would have preferred a red casket that sparkled. The red one looked more like a sports car, and he loved sports cars, especially Corvettes.

She glanced at the mountain one more time. *My precious cousin, this will be your beautiful view for eternity*. She lowered her head, and quietly wept.

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After the funeral everyone gathered at James and Sharon's house. People Lana knew were boisterous with their opinions on death. Their opinions got on her last nerve. She didn't want to deal with their epiphany of wisdom on how she should handle her grieving. Instead of dealing with them, she decided to adhere to a more surreal surrounding, the front porch. An old wooden swing sat at the far end of the porch. No one sat out there, not even the children. She would have

complete solitude. The swing creaked when she sat down, and it made a struggled squeak when she went back and forth in a slow rhythm. She smiled when she thought about what James might say at a time like this. "The swing is saying you need to lose weight."

She didn't know many of the guests who were coming and going. They nodded an acknowledgment as they saw her. That suited her just fine because she was content sitting alone. Swinging and listening to all the sounds outside eased the ache in her heart. In the distance, she could hear kids playing kickball in the street; they were taking advantage of the last few days of the warm weather. Three houses down an older man mowed his yard for the last time this year. Inside dishes were clanking as people made their plates of food. Lana kept swinging in a slow steady rhythm.

After an hour, Sharon walked outside to say goodbye to friends and saw Lana swinging.

When she glanced up, the sun shining on Sharon's hair showed the gray in her shoulder length hair. Through the years, she had gained a little weight, but she did have three kids and gravity had taken its toll on her midsection. Some of the chubbiness was from being so short; she couldn't be over five feet tall and didn't have a long torso to help hide her weight. Even with all that had happened she walked with some perkiness during her mourning. And thank God she had changed out of her black dress.

When the guests left, she walked over and sat with Lana on the old wood swing. Lana slowed down a bit as Sharon sat next to her. "How are you?" Sharon asked while crossing her legs. The squeaking swing struggled a little bit, and even though it whined, Lana had no intentions of stopping.

"I've seen better days. I'm a strong person, and I will get through this. I just have to figure out how."

Sharon put her arm around Lana and gave her an affectionate squeeze. "Of all the people who love him, I think you'll miss James the most. I think sometimes you were closer to him than me."

"Well, I did have many more years with him than you did. If you remember I was the first person you were introduced to," she said as she noticed Sharon's swollen eyes and the puffy bags under them. It was sad to see her so heartbroken.

Sharon reminisced, "I remember the first time James introduced us. You were getting ready for a date and had messed up your eye makeup, so James offered to help. You let him put on your eye shadow, but he made it worse. He put blue eye shadow on one eye and brown on the other. The whole time he was messing up your make-up, he was winking at me. I tried hard not to laugh. When you looked in the mirror and saw what he did you tried to kill him."

Lana grinned when she thought about James being a toot. "Yeah, if I could have caught him—he would have died that night. And if you remember right, because of his shenanigans I needed to redo all my makeup which made me late. He met my date at the door and acted as though he had a facial twitch."

Sharon rolled her head back with laughter and said, "He told Carl the twitch ran in the family."

"No, he didn't? He never told me about that. I could tell Carl wanted the date to end, and now I know why."

"Believe it or not, James felt guilty about telling him a lie, and that could be the reason he never told you. James also said Carl was not the right one for you, especially if he could be driven off so easily."

"He should have felt guilty."

With a little twinkle in her eyes, Sharon added, "You know every time James ran into Carl, he all of a sudden developed another twitch."

"Now I know why every time I saw Carl he asked me about my health. I'm surprised I could catch a husband at all the way James acted."

Some guests were leaving so Sharon excused herself to talk with them. James made the right choice by choosing her. She could take a joke better than most, and he constantly pulled something on her. No matter how many pranks he pulled, he never showed any maliciousness. She would laugh and go about her business, and sometimes she would get even. With all sincerity, she felt sorry for Sharon. While she got to go home to her routine, Sharon had to go to bed alone.

## Chapter 4

Lana thought putting the funeral behind her would have helped her disposition, but instead her depression and weariness lingered. She did not answer the phone or door. She barely ate and slept; her eyes were sunken, and she had developed dark circles under them. With all her heart, she missed James terribly, and she didn't know how to get over this feeling of dread.

Her kids knew the difficult time their mom had the past few weeks, and they were worried about her. They thought the best thing for her was to get away, so they begged her to visit them in Colorado for a few weeks. The kids were right, she needed to get away. She loved them bunches, but she needed to be alone in a foreign place, not with her children. Being with family conjured too many memories.

After days of thinking, she made a decision to go to the beach. She would go north and rent a beach house. Being off-season, finding a rental would not be a problem. Getting away should help her to rejuvenate herself and escape the memories.

She decided on the Cape Cod area in Massachusetts. Plymouth sounded like a great place. The pilgrims landed there to make a fresh start, and she could make a fresh start too. Her family went there for a vacation when she was a child, and she remembered loving the beach and playing with her sisters.

She would fly into Boston and take a slow drive down Highway Three along the coast through the little old towns. She could shop along the way and brush-up on some history. Happiness filled her heart just thinking about getting away to new surroundings and being alone.

## Chapter 5

### Day 1

Today was Lana's flight to Boston, and she sat waiting for her plane drinking her second cup of coffee. Normally she didn't like the hustle and bustle of the busy airports, but today it kept her mind busy and off her woes. The people at the airport moved around without a care in the world except to catch their plane and get to their destination. Kids played, cell phones buzzed, couples held hands, and everyone was filled with life.

Two aisles over a newly married couple were discussing where they wanted to visit when they got to Boston. The young bride mentioned she wanted to go see eerily haunted lighthouses—emphasizing the word eerily. She also wanted to tour all the famous old houses and the Boston Common, where hangings took place. The girl read out loud, "Many events happened at the Boston Common, but the most notable were the hangings. In 1660 Mary Dyer, along with three other Quakers, was hung. Still today, many people see Mary Dyer standing by the hanging noose wearing a black dress."

The young groom, on the other hand, talked about relaxing in the hotel room. Lana smiled because she knew what that meant. They were adorable and full of love, holding hands and smooching every five seconds. She knew they would work it out between them. *Life goes on*, Lana thought.

Her thoughts were interrupted by a man. "Is this seat taken?"

"Oh no, please sit down," Lana answered trying to be polite, but she honestly did not want to chitchat. She moved her belongings out of the chair, and felt inconsiderate given the airport was packed with people.

"Are you on your way to Boston for business or pleasure? By the way, my name is Peter." He reached his hand out to shake hers, and she obliged.

"I'm going to Plymouth for a vacation, and my name is Lana. Are you on your way home?" she asked to be cordial, even though she could care less.

"My home is New Jersey, but I have some business in Boston. If you're interested in getting out, there are lots of sights to see in Boston. You can visit the Museum of Fine Arts, The Prudential Skywalk, and Paul Revere House for starters."

"Thanks, I might consider that, but I'm staying at a beach house outside of Boston, and I'm not sure if I'll get back to Boston before I leave." She kind of liked the idea of going to those places. She noticed when he said museum—he said it oddly. He said mooseum, like calling a cow.

"There are plenty of lighthouses, and nowadays you can even stay the night in some of them."

"I'm sure Plymouth has many sights or many lighthouses."

"I think they have some of the oldest lighthouses in the nation. There's Wings Neck, Sandy Neck, Nobska Point, Race Point, Highland Light, Wood End, and Long Point Light."

"Oh my, you do know your lighthouses." Her eyes widened as he rattled them off his tongue without thinking about it.

"My wife and I tour lighthouses a few times a year. We enjoy the history of all of them. Sometimes we even go ghost hunting in them."

Their conversation was interrupted. "Lana Andrews, please report to Gate 14." Lana looked over to the young attendant who motioned for her to come to the gate.

"I hear my name being called. It was nice talking to you. Have a safe trip," she said while

gathering her belongings.

"You have a safe trip too."

When Lana made the reservation she mentioned she wanted to sit alone. The attendant informed her of an empty seat at the back of the plane with no one near her.

Lana took it.

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The back of the plane must have been the working area. There were many men in their William Fioravanti, Milan's Caraceni, and Polo Ralph Lauren suits. They were getting out their laptops, and their Android phones were buzzing. Obviously, the men flew many times because their belongings were organized in their small, tight space. The last few minutes they were hurriedly talking with their wives and offices, planning supper and making deals. One of the men even talked about giving one hundred thousand dollars to the Heart Association, and considering what happened with James, Lana was elated. She got out her small HP laptop, not as fancy as theirs, but she was in the business section and needed to look busy. She even put her glasses on to look important.

Once in the air, her heart lightened. In just a few short hours, she would be strolling along the beach and walking through her little quaint beach house. She might even sit for awhile and watch the Gurnet lighthouse across the cove.

Tennessee's weather was warm, and she was anticipating the brisk fall weather of Cape Cod, and a blazing fire to keep her warm at night. *Is the fireplace wood-burning or gas?* Lana racked her brain trying to remember. Deep down she'd hoped it would be wood-burning because she liked the crackling of the fire. Either way, it's a fresh start for her to apportion her feelings. Yes, an absolute yes, getting away had been the best thing she could have ever done.

She noticed Peter near the front of the plane. Although he seemed like a personable guy, she truly hoped he didn't come to the back. Since her flight would last three hours, she wanted to catch a couple of hours of sleep. She pulled out her Ipod and decided to listen to the Carpenters, her workout cool down music. The softness of the music might help her get the sleep she desperately needed.

When she started to doze, she felt a tap on her shoulder. It was Peter. She pulled out an earplug.

"Hi Lana, I was on my way to the bathroom when I noticed you were sitting alone. I didn't want to pass you by without speaking."

"Hi Peter."

"Do you mind if I sit for awhile?" he asked, almost sitting down without an invitation.

"Peter, if you don't mind I just want to be alone right now, but thanks for the chitchat earlier."

She could tell her reaction didn't make him happy when he reluctantly nodded and walked off with a scowl on his face. She guessed he had already gone to the bathroom.

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There was a long line at Enterprise car rental. The attendant seemed frustrated when she surveyed at least twenty people waiting. Lana was aggravated to have nine people in front of her. Children were anxious and running around as their parents tried to corral them. An upset couple

yelled at the attendant because their reserved car had been rented to someone else. She offered an upgrade free of charge, but they wouldn't hear of it. While waiting in line, she thought about relaxing on the back porch and listening to the waves and wind. Some people think going on vacation to a sunny place would be more cheerful, but not for her. Fall was her favorite season, and while some people thought going south to the sun was a real vacation, she knew the north would be her best destination. Today was a dreary day, just the way she liked it. She didn't even mind some rain, as long as it didn't rain the entire vacation.

Knowing she would be in line for awhile she called Mike Ramsey, the beach house owner to let him know she was running late. She dreaded the call because he always acted as though she annoyed him.

He picked up the phone on the third ring. "Hello," he answered in his husky voice.

"Hi Mike, this is Lana. I wanted to let you know the plane was late because of bad weather, and there's a long line at Enterprise. How do you want me to pick up the keys?" She scrunched her face, dreading the answer. He never said anything to reassure her.

As expected, his answer was quick and to the point. "I'll meet you at the house. What time do you think you will get there?"

Lana tried to balance everything in her hands while trying to look at the time on her cell phone. "About two... maybe three... hours, do you want to hide the key for me?"

"No, I'll meet you at the house."

"Thanks. I really appreciate it," she replied with all sincerity.

"You're welcome. I'll see you then." He hung up abruptly.

Well, at least he said you're welcome—that's a good start.

When she finally got her little gas-saver Ford Focus, she continued her journey to Plymouth. She noticed the overcast sky had darkened and all the leaves had fallen leaving the trees bare. The leaves conjured happy memories of childhood when her and James would rake the leaves in a pile and jump in the middle. She had tried her hardest to get James to do the raking so she could do the jumping, but he wouldn't hear of it. They spent hours raking and jumping. No matter how many scratches they got from the rough dry leaves and twigs, they jumped over and over in the pile. When they were about ten, they piled the leaves almost as tall as the house and then jumped into them from the roof. It was a miracle they didn't break their necks.

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Thank the stars for GPS or Lana would never have found the beach house. It was a beautiful drive. The sunset glowed, leaving remnants of orange and purple lingering in the sky. The ocean roared to her left, and she cracked the window so she could smell the salt in the air.

As she turned onto the cul-de-sac, she could see fire coming from the chimney. It *was* a wood burning fireplace. As she drove closer to the house, she couldn't believe what a breathtaking view. Talk about a Thomas Kincaid setting. The house sat at the end of a cul-de-sac and behind the house was the vastness of the Atlantic Ocean. The anvil clouds allowed the deep setting sun to peek through just a little bit. Flickers of orange bounced off the waves as they capped. The orange made the ocean look like a dream. Lights illuminated through the windows at this quaint little beach house causing a faint glow. The hint of fog in the air made the glowing look like Heaven, or at least how she imagined Heaven. Just the sweet look of the house made her feel propitious.

Next to the house sat an old white 1982 Dodge pickup. She knew it was Mike's truck and,

although she never met Mike, she knew he looked like a ship's captain—a gruff looking man who was short, chubby, and grumpy. She imagined he had a long white beard with a pipe. Also, he had a short temperament with a get-to-the-point personality. She also knew he'd be annoyed with her for being so late. And now that she saw his truck, she thought her initial description of him would be right.

As she got out of the car she felt the crisp salt air sting her face, and it felt good. The air was refreshing, and for the first time in weeks, she felt peace in her heart. Peace turned to nervousness when the front door opened, and Mike walked out to the front porch. She knew he would fuss at her. But instead she heard his warm words say in his incredible deep voice, "Welcome to Massachusetts! I hope you had a good trip. I have started a warm fire for you."

His kindness surprised her, and she thought that gesture was a change for the better. Lana graciously responded, not quite paying attention to him. She preferred looking at the amazing scenery. "Hi Mike, at first I was going to say *again* how sorry I am that I'm late, but now I'm not. A few minutes later—I might have missed all this beauty. What a beautiful home you have, especially at sunset. This is far more beautiful than I ever expected, I did time this perfectly." She finally looked up and took a good look at him. She was taken aback by his height. He was every bit of six-foot-four with salt and pepper hair, mostly pepper, piercing sky-blue eyes, and a smile that would brighten any gloomy day. He was in excellent shape with no chubby tummy on him. His five o'clock shadow showed he'd had a long day. He wore jeans and a blue oxford button-up shirt with a black jacket. The shirt certainly brought out his blue eyes, even at dusk. She noticed his crisp white T-shirt under his shirt, and thought it looked refreshing.

His rugged good looks caught her off-guard, and she was at a loss for words. She fumbled with her keys and finally found the trunk key. Awkwardly, she managed to walk to the back to get her two bags. In just a few quick steps, he moved in close behind her, reaching for the suitcases. His strong arm brushed hers and just for a few seconds, their eyes met. Lana turned away, knowing her face turned bright red. She happily noticed his face also turned red. He easily lifted the heavy bags; it was like lifting a feather. She remembered how she struggled to put them in the trunk.

"Let me get those for you. As little as you are, I'm surprised you could lift them at all."

"I managed, and thank-you for helping."

She scampered in the house and noticed how warm and inviting it was. At the front door was a small entrance with the living room straight ahead, and it had a glowing fireplace to the right. On the left was the elegant kitchen with a small island that had a bar. Next to the bar sat a small but quaint dinette set. Off that room was the guest bedroom, and she noticed the bed covers were removed for the winter. To the right of the den was the master bedroom.

She loved the kitchen. The cabinets were made of old driftwood. All the appliances were stainless. This gorgeous kitchen would be one only seen in magazines, definitely a kitchen she could picture Mike building... or at least the captain Mike she first visualized.

The fire blazed, leaving an orange glow echoing across the room from the dark painted walls. The darkness of the room looked more like a mountain cabin than a beach house.

Mike placed some Bella Casara cheese and crackers on the bar, along with a bottle of Pinot Noir wine. He certainly had good taste in wine and cheese.

He interrupted her thoughts, "I knew you probably didn't have time to shop, so I bought a few things to get you through tomorrow. The wine is for you to enjoy this evening and relax."

She looked up at him to thank him, and his eyes looked squarely into hers before she embarrassingly looked down and said, "Thank you." Her face flushed, and her stomach flip-

flopped as he walked past her. She thought he mumbled the words, *you're welcome*. When he reached the door, he quickly told her where he hung the keys and where he put his phone numbers. This time when she looked up he didn't look at her. Then he left without a proper goodbye, but she was too tired to think about it.

As she stepped onto the back porch, the darkness didn't allow her to catch a glimpse of the ocean, but she could hear it. The waves rolled in with a deafening roar. She closed her eyes and pictured the waves slamming the beach then disappearing into oblivion. She remembered as a child lying in bed and listening to the ocean talk to her. She hoped that same feeling relaxed her tonight. It was funny how she distinctly remembered the sound even though it was decades ago.

When she opened her eyes, her memory fast-forwarded to today and the reason she was here... to mourn. Then, an overwhelming sorrow plagued her heart, and her eyes filled with tears. Lana wiped them away and told herself no more tears today. Instead, she got busy checking out the fridge. She found some smoked turkey breast and fixed a sandwich with a glass of milk. She looked at the bottle of wine and decided to save it for her last night. Once she cleaned the kitchen, she sat in front of the fire and watched the flames. The fire relaxed her soul, leaving her with a much-needed feeling of content.

Exhaustion had overridden her sadness—a blessed alternative. She lay on the couch, and a smile crossed her face as she thought about how Mike didn't fuss at her. Then darkness fell.

## Chapter 6

### Day 2

Lana woke to rain lightly falling, making a pitter patter sound. It sounded like a symphony orchestra softly playing Beethoven's *Fur Elise*. As much as she enjoyed her personal concert, she had to get moving. She stretched and realized how cold it was in the house. She wrapped a brown patch work quilt around her shoulders and hunted for the thermostat. The fire had died out, but a few small embers glowed beneath the ash. She stirred them trying to coax them back to life then added a few logs, hoping the fire would rejuvenate itself.

Then she ran to the kitchen to make coffee, wishing she had remembered her house shoes. She danced around like a ballerina in Swan Lake, hoping if she jumped high enough her feet wouldn't touch the cold tiles. Acting silly caused her to trip and almost fall, but not before stepping on the blanket. Lana laughed at herself when she realized she could stand on the blanket and scoot. *Accidents happen for a reason.*

She rummaged through the cabinet and found Folgers coffee, her favorite. Mike did a good job supplying her with her desperately needed morning java. Milk tasted good in the coffee, but she would have to remember to get some French vanilla cream. The fridge did have some raspberry pastries, so she nuked one. She snuggled in the patchwork quilt and watched the news.

The weather report stated the bone-chilling cold was predicted to stay around for a couple more days; then the temperature might drop twenty degrees when the low came down from Canada. Watching the Weather Channel reminded her of visits from her grandmother. Granny always watched the weather channel for ten hours straight. She pointed to the different parts of the country wherever it happened to be raining. "Look, it's going to rain any minute," she would say, even though there wasn't a cloud in the sky. Lana always smiled when she thought about Granny and her antics.

Thirty minutes had passed since she turned up the heat and the temperature in the house still lingered at fifty-eight degrees. She rechecked the thermostat and the lever pointed to heat, but there was none. Maybe the pilot light had blown out, or at least that's what she hoped because that's a minor fix. She quickly took a hot shower and got ready to go to shopping and grab some lunch, but first she needed to call Mike and let him know about the heater.

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Sam's grocery looked like a little mom-and-pop place. The parking lot had only twenty parking slots. On the far right side, close to the parking lot were two gas pumps. As she pulled in she looked over at them and noticed the top of one of the pumps said Ethel. It was barely legible because of all the muck in the glass window. *You just don't see an old-time pump like that anymore.* She giggled to herself while wondering how much those old pumps would sell on Ebay. Two men stood outside the door fussing about something. They waved to her when she drove into the parking slot. As she walked past the men, she said, "Hi." They stopped their talking as she walked past, but didn't speak to her. People up north were not friendly at all, including Mike.

As she walked into the grocery, a clerk was sweeping up a bag of sugar that had burst on the floor. An overweight lady who sat at the cash register gave her opinion on everything the clerk was doing wrong, but didn't offer any assistance. Maybe she did help a little—she pointed to the dust pan.

Lana noticed there wasn't much of a food selection. She grabbed a few canned goods and some lunch meat at the deli. There wasn't a large selection of fresh vegetables, so she selected a few that looked okay. Later she would go to a bigger grocery store to grab some more wholesome veggies. They did have a meat department with fresh meat. She bought some steak, bacon and chicken. The steak would be for the last night. She made sure she had enough steak for Mike, just in case. She also grabbed two large potatoes for baking.

The drive home was as beautiful as the drive last night. She took her time and enjoyed the scenery. The morning fog had lifted, and she could see the ocean better. The view looked amazing. She could see for miles in all directions. There's an endless view of lighthouses on their own little peninsulas. In the distance, there were all sorts of ships, yachts, and sailboats. To her surprise and delight, she saw the sailboat *Maltese Falcon*. What a treat—she couldn't believe her luck. For years, she had seen pictures of this beauty, and now she had the privilege of seeing it in person. She giggled at herself and decided *she now liked the beach*.

She turned on Shadow Lane. All four of the houses on the cul-de-sac were on the beach side, facing the woods. Mike's house sat at the end facing the road. The houses were cookie-cutter homes with small front porches and large back porches with a beautiful view of the ocean. Gray seemed to be the going exterior color, and all of them were trimmed in white. None of the houses had garages, but they all had designated parking slots made of gravel. Each driveway had enough space for two vehicles.

Azalea bushes were the only greenery that surrounded the houses other than some dune grass splattered around the sand. Lana didn't mind the lack of grass because the beaches shouldn't look like the suburbs.

Driving into her designated slot, she noticed Mike's truck and wondered how long he had been working. She hoped not long. Deep down she knew if he had just arrived she would get to spend more time with him. She hooked all the plastic bags on her arms and toted them into the house. She eagerly looked forward to seeing him. To her surprise he didn't greet her at the door. After a few loud noises, she realized he was in the attic, busy working on the furnace.

She noticed the fire had caught hold, so she tossed in a couple of logs. Once the room warmed up she took off her jacket to tackle the salad. But first, she took a swig of chamomile tea. She bought several kinds, but that was her favorite. She loved to try many different kinds of tea. Many people love wine tasting, but Lana preferred tea. Sometimes she mixed her own concoctions: lemon rind, honey, milk, and fresh or frozen fruit. Consummating the flavors is what she called it.

The stairs squeaked with heaviness as Mike stomped down them. He mumbled and cursed about the heater under his breath. He walked in with a dirty face and grungy hands carrying a section of round metal tube.

With one eyebrow cocked, he said, "It's the starter to the furnace, and I'll have to replace it." He glanced over, noticed the fire and commented on it. "Wow, you started a fire; not too many women can do that—I'm impressed." He wanted to start a conversation with her, and the fire was the first thought that popped into his mind.

"Well I guess I'm not a typical woman, and I guess I've been single for so long I only have myself to depend on," she answered without glancing into his eyes. She didn't know what it was about his baby blues, but it sure was difficult to look into them. She took a deep breath and added, "Besides, if you get cold enough you can get a rip-roaring fire started—it's called survival." Wow, she just couldn't get over how pretty his eyes were, and he even had dimples when he smiled. Her stomach fluttered, and her heart skipped beats under his constant gaze. It's a

good thing she didn't make a living predicting what people looked like; in Mike's case, she would go hungry. He looked opposite of her initial description.

Taking his time, he gathered up the part and headed for the door. Under normal circumstances, he would find an excuse to stay or start a conversation. His mind went blank. He couldn't talk to her about the part, she might be bored. Maybe he could talk to her about her trip, but that seemed desperate. He could revert to college days and ask her about her sign. He laughed to himself about how stupid that was back then... and it's still stupid. Then his eureka moment happened. He would ask her to lunch, that's what he'd ask her. He stopped dead in his tracks.

With her mind still dwelling on his baby blues, she was trying to decide if she should invite him to lunch. Boom! She ran right smack into his back and tumbled to the ground. When she slammed into him, she felt as though she had run into a brick wall.

He quickly turned around and grabbed for her and almost slipped and fell himself.

They both laughed hysterically, and then he lent a hand to help her stand. "Are you all right?"

"I only have a bruised ego and maybe a bruised bottom. I didn't expect you to stop so quickly," she said as she rubbed her butt. Their laugh broke the ice. She noticed he held her hand just a few seconds longer than he had to, and she let him.

"It's lunch time, and since I knocked you down, the least I can do is buy you lunch. That is if you want to come with me. Do you?"

She could tell he hoped she would join him. He acted like a school boy asking the cute girl to the homecoming, shuffling his feet and waiting for an answer. He looked tall standing there, anticipating a response. She wondered if she should make him wait for an answer, watch him squirm. No, that would be too mean. "I have a better idea; I have everything for a chef salad. How about you join me?"

"I would love to join you, but only if one day this week you allow me to drive you around and show you our historic town," he said without thinking about it. He was anxious to get to know this woman. In the back of his mind, all he could think about was how soft her hand felt.

"Sure." She guessed they had a date. For the past six years, since her divorce, she had decided not to date, or at least not much. Her friends had introduced her to a few men, but they never connected emotionally. Because of her horrible marriage, she didn't want to get seriously involved with anyone. Right now, she was happy with her life. She had a terrific family, children, friends, and work. James always wanted her to meet someone worthy of her love. He joked around with her and told her that whoever she dated had to pass his approval. She wondered if he would like Mike. That was an answer she would never know. Yet, somehow she knew James would approve. Yep, she relished the idea of spending the day with this handsome man.

She got the vegetables and spread them on the bar. "Tell me what kind of veggies you want or don't want in the salad."

He looked them and began to separate them. He placed the lettuce to the right, cheese to the right, salad peppers to the right, smoked turkey to the right, onions to the left, mushrooms to the right, and finally bacon bits to the right. "I want everything to the right in the salad and everything else, nil."

"You don't like onions?" She loved onions.

"I love them, but you never know—I might have to kiss someone today."

Panic ran through her body. *Was he hinting that he had a girlfriend?* "Okay, no onions!"

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