



ONE

Katherine Adamson woke to the teasing aroma of coffee—Arabica beans brewed strong and hot. She reached up to touch her face; eyes still closed. Her hand felt warm against the coolness of her cheek.

The room's chilly air danced upon her sleepy eyelids, but her feet, nestled into the folds of hand-stitched warmth, reveled in the cozy comforts of sleeping late. The aroma tickled her nostrils and stimulated her sleepy brain, forcing Katy's unwilling eyelids to open.

Has Joshua made coffee? What a darling man!

Outside the windows, Katherine could hear a cardinal singing, but the beautiful melody troubled her—*where are the other birds?*

“Josh?” she called, sitting up in the downy bed. How long had she slept? Hours? Days? Years? Despite the long rest, Katy felt groggy, heavy, almost hung-over.

“Josh!” she called, wondering why the world seemed out of kilter. “Carpenter! Heidi! Hey, McMahan! Why did you guys let me sleep so long?”

The puzzled writer sat up in bed, noticing how soft

the mattress felt beneath her hands—much softer than it should. Cissy’s penchant for hard, board-like mattresses left no room for such a cushiony embrace as this. “Anybody here?” she called out, louder this time.

Taking a deep breath of the chilly air, Katy flung the soft quilts aside and swung both legs over to the side of the warm bed. Glancing down, she noticed a familiar looking, braided rug in sage green wool against a parquet, hardwood floor. *That rug looks just like the one in my bedroom back in Missouri*, she thought sleepily. *I’m still dreaming. Wait—did Dr. Prosser drug me? That’s it! It’s the medicine making me crazy.*

“Josh!” she called out, standing up on the deep-piled rug. “Heidi!”

Nothing. Katy searched for the chenille bathrobe she’d worn every day since arriving in Eden, but the walnut chair where she’d left it was gone. In fact, all the furniture she remembered had disappeared, replaced with other, familiar pieces that she knew well, although none of it belonged in Eden.

The beautiful, antique Dutch Colonial Tester bed from Cissy’s house had been replaced with a reproduction maple sleigh bed. Where the wardrobe her great-great grandmother had brought over from Germany had stood just yesterday, Katy now found a six-drawer, maple chest.

“I bought that at a garage sale right after moving to—wait a minute! This isn’t possible!” Katy whispered to herself, panic seizing her throat. She flung open the bedroom closet and found her entire wardrobe hanging in place, her suitcases tucked onto a top shelf.

“This is crazy!” she said, slamming the closet doors.

“I’m still asleep; that’s what it is. Apollo Bell gave me that drug in the flower, and I’m hallucinating again.”

Footsteps outside followed by a soft knock. *Please God, this is where I wake up for real, right?*

Katy turned to the door and listened for a moment. She found an unfamiliar, silk bathrobe in the master bath and quickly pulled it tight, knotting the belt around her waist. “Who is it? Joshua? Sorry I overslept. I’ve had the craziest dream!”

The white, painted door opened, and a man she hadn’t seen in months entered. He carried a large, wooden tray, laden with coffee, croissants, and a single white rose.

“Morning, sleepyhead. I brought coffee—just the way you like it—three sugars and creamer, and here’s the Post-Dispatch. Oh, your new agent called. He’s anxious to talk about the film rights for *Widow’s Son*.” The man paused, gazing at her. “Kathy, are you all right?”

“David?” she asked, certain now that she was still dreaming.

“That’s right, Sweetie. Gee, you look pale! Is it that headache again? Maybe I should call Dr. Evans about changing your medication. You can sleep some more, if you want. I can call your agent back. No hurry.”

“David, what are you doing here?”

“Why wouldn’t I be here?” he parried back. “Honey, you’re worrying me. Maybe I brought you home too soon. But you seemed fine last night. Here, drink this coffee and have a croissant. They’re fresh—bought ‘em this morning at that French bakery you like so much. See? They’re the ones with the chocolate inside. You’ll feel better with a full stomach.”

Adamson shook her head slowly, blinking to clear the cobwebs. “You’re not here,” she said tightly. “I’m still asleep in Cissy’s bed back in Eden, and you’re just another one of Bell’s hallucinations. I’m not falling for it. Do you hear me, Bell? I’m not falling for it!”

David Sinclair’s gray eyes grew soft, and he set down the tray. “Kathy, honey, maybe you should get back into bed. I’ll call Dr. Evans, and—honey, what is wrong? You’re looking at me like I’m a ghost or something!”

Katy laughed nervously. “You are ghost! You’re a specter! A wraith with no compassion or the tiniest shred of decency! I want to wake up—dear God, please, let me wake up! Because this isn’t real—you’re not real! It’s all a crazy dream—or a devil’s trick!”

Sinclair reached for her hands, but Katy yanked them back, slapping him across his left cheek. “Don’t ever touch me!” she screamed. “You’re not real! Nothing about you was ever real—you’re a liar and a cheater! I want Joshua!”

David reached for her hands again, forcing her body into his arms, and he held her in an iron lock. “Kathy, darling—you have to calm down or else Dr. Evans will put you back into the hospital. You don’t want that, do you? You’ve been out of it for a long time, but soon you’ll remember everything. Please don’t leave me again, Sweetie. I couldn’t bear it. Stay with me—in the present. Your beautiful mind is fragile, yes, but you don’t have to give in.”

Katherine Adamson shoved Sinclair aside, nearly causing him to stumble. “Don’t touch me!” she wailed. “I’m asleep! That’s all—you’re a nightmare!”

David spoke softly, barely touching Katy’s shoulder,

trying not to startle her. “Kathy, you’ve made so much progress, please don’t slip back,” he begged. “Do you remember the accident?”

She turned, her dark brown eyes round and circled in pain. “What? What are you talking about? What accident?”

He reached for her left hand and pointed to a wide gold band and marquis diamond set. “Don’t you remember?” he asked her. “Right after our wedding? The car crash? Honey, you were in a coma for months. You only regained consciousness two weeks ago. Maybe I shouldn’t have pushed Dr. Evans to let me bring you home so soon.”

Katy stared at the wedding set. *Where is Joshua’s ring?* She had no memory of a wedding or an accident. *He’s lying—he has to be!* Just then, she caught a glimpse of her reflection in the bathroom mirror—her hair was short, and she remembered cutting it with dress shears after learning about David’s lies. Short hair proved he was still lying.

“So I’m crazy, is that it? Well, what happened to my hair then?” she asked the man claiming to be her husband. “My hair was long—remember? Down my back, and you loved it—you adored it! But I cut it, didn’t I? I hacked it off with scissors just to make you mad. That’s right! This is proof. I cut my hair to hurt you because of what you did to me, David! I chopped it off, because you loved it! That’s proof that you’re lying!”

David touched the short locks of auburn, barely two inches long, and tears rolled down his cheeks. “Honey, your hair is just now growing back. You nearly died, Kathy. The accident caused a severe brain injury, and it

took two surgeries to save your life. The nurses had to shave your gorgeous hair, but I saved it. I've got it in a box. I kept it for you. Kathy, don't you remember any of it?"

She stared at the man she'd known for ten years; the man who had loved her and left her; the man she remembered as a liar; the man she had wished never to see again. *What about Joshua? Did I imagine him?*

"I *must* be dreaming," she repeated softly, tears tracing the curves of her face. "I'm cold," she whispered, and David drew her close.

"We had a winter storm here last night, and the heat's off. I've got a roaring fire built downstairs. What do you say we go down and finish the coffee there, huh?"

Katy's mind raced from one reality to the next. "This is *my* house—the one in Kirkwood?"

"It is. But I like to think of it as ours, especially now. Come on. I'll put the DVD of *Casablanca* on, and we can lose ourselves in another world for a while. What do you say?"

"I think I'm asleep," she whispered. "But you left me, David—you went back to your wife."

"My wife?" he echoed as he led her down the stairs. "The only wife I have ever had is you, silly. It's all been a dream until now. I'll take care of you from now on. Just trust me, all right?"

Katherine leaned on Sinclair's shoulder as they descended each step. "All right," she agreed at last. "But what about Eden?" she asked, her voice small like a child's.

"It's far away, Kathy. Like a memory—a distant, dreamy memory. I think you might have lived another

life while you were in your coma, but you're awake now. From now on, I'll be your reality. That's all you need to know.