

## Chapter One Excerpt

Kathryn Richards had no idea what hurt more – her aching back or her broken heart. She'd been driving sixteen hours straight since leaving Seattle. And still had another eight or nine hours to go before reaching L.A. If only she had budgeted her money more wisely, then she might have had enough for a night's stay in a cheap motel. Which of course wasn't the most ideal of choices, but at least that would have gotten her out of this excuse-of-a-car and allowed her to stretch her legs. Take a quick shower. Or treat herself to a long nap. As it was, Kate barely had enough money for gas, and even less energy to make the long and arduous trek down the I – 5 corridor.

Yet nothing compared to what she had gone through her last year of graduate studies at the University of Washington. What with classes, comprehensive exams and orals, and dealing with her dissertation committee (particularly one professor, Dr. Randall Carlyle by name), she was exhausted beyond anything she imagined she could endure. But it was all worth it, for at last she held her PhD diploma in Library Science in her hand and nothing or nobody was ever going to take that away from her.

Not even Randy.

The douche canoe.

“Oh, crap!” Kate blurted out as once again she found her eyes welling up with tears. When was she ever going to be done crying over this man who she thought loved her as much as she loved him?

Soon, her mind kept assuring her. But her heart kept repeating not yet.

Still the tears came whenever she thought about how stupid she had been to get herself romantically mixed up with the one professor who served as her dissertation chair. True, Randy—that is, Dr. Carlyle—had been super kind, respectful and irresistibly handsome. Unfortunately, however, and unbeknownst to her, he also had been married.

“Idiot! Idiot! Idiot!” Kate chanted as she pounded on the steering wheel of her twenty year old Honda Civic, no longer directing her anger at Mr. Sexy Ass Hat, but solely at herself. “For an overly educated woman, Dr. Richards, you sure are a dunce!” she scolded as she turned off the freeway to gas up at the first station she spotted.

For the umpteenth time Kate found herself standing in an ice cold, stinky public bathroom splashing water on her swollen face and reapplying what little makeup she had brought with her for the trip. As she looked in the mirror, Kate noted that with each pit stop her face became less puffy and her crying less frequent.

“Criminy!” she said out loud. “By the time I get to LA I may actually be over that turd!”

Kate then put on her best fake smile as she pointed at her reflection. “It’s show time!” she pronounced to no one other than herself. And then shoved her things back into her oversized tote—the Jimmy Choo knock off she bought at Wal-Mart for one sixteenth of the going price. And made a bee-line for the cashier, where she not only paid for her gas, but a few *necessary* snacks to tide her over.

A box of Junior Mints.

A can of Diet Coke.

And a two-pill packet of Aleve.

After checking all four tires to make sure they still held enough air to complete her trip, Kate crawled back behind the wheel of the only vehicle she had ever owned and aimed the front grill toward her final destination. She had been lucky to have been given the car by Grammy Lou, one of the few friends she made so far in her short life. Louise Pederson had been Kate's case worker all the years she lived in foster care. And unlike the many foster moms Kate had been subjected to, Grammy Lou truly cared about Kate. And offered her the kind of stability and encouragement she needed as a young girl and teen.

But even Grammy Lou was now gone, having passed away several years earlier from a sudden heart attack, leaving Kate with many treasured memories as well as an ancient car with low mileage.

Kate was also fortunate that the first job since graduation waited for her at the prestigious University of California, Los Angeles. Assistant Research Librarian for the main library on campus was nothing to sneeze at. And after all the hoopla between her and her dissertation chair, Kate knew how lucky she was to have gotten out of Seattle with her degree, let alone a job offer!

And a chance to start over.

Again.

In fact, Kate was a bona fide expert at the starting over game. From the time she left the orphanage in Tacoma as a young girl of seven, to the many foster families she was shifted to and from over the next ten years, Kate had grown accustomed to new beginnings and at the same time more wary of them. As far as she was concerned, starting over was over rated.