



Chapter One

Katie Garrett's hopes were dashed right after the arrival of the ridiculous trousers. It wasn't the fault of the trousers, of course, but it was tempting to blame them nonetheless.

Her morning had already been off to a bad start. Yesterday, Katie's boss had unceremoniously announced that Nickell, March & Co. would no longer be requiring her services. This was unexpected news—her performance reviews had always indicated that she was a perfectly satisfactory Designer II of Structural and Graphic Solutions (in other words, a packaging designer)—but apparently “market realities” had come to bear and *blah, blah, blah*. Katie stopped listening and focused on her boss's puffy, creased neck flesh while willing herself not to cry. When it was over, and with her face burning, she'd cleared out her cubicle and come home in a daze, trying to figure out how to break the news to Liam as the twilight leeches from the cramped rooms of their tiny apartment.

At nearly eight he'd burst breathlessly through the door, arms full of flowers, already apologizing—the wretched Sanders

account, sucking the life from his poor overworked soul, had demanded yet another eleven-hour day—and when he finally wound down, she couldn't bring herself to burden him further. She put the flowers (a dozen dazzling gerberas, bright and gaudy and ungodly expensive) in a vase and called their favorite Thai place, and when Liam went out to pick up the *mee krob*, she allowed herself a quick cry before blowing her nose and taking off her ruined mascara.

She'd fallen asleep on the couch and woke several hours later to discover that Liam had turned out the lights and gone to bed. She shuffled groggily to the bedroom and collapsed. In the morning, she woke after Liam had already showered and gone. As she squeezed past the ancient bathroom sink to the toilet, she caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror and noticed that a noodle was stuck in her hair. So this was how unemployment was going to be.

She had intended to use her first full day of unemployment to plan how to deliver the bad news, and also to bring up the subject of finding a bigger apartment. She'd let Liam talk her into this minuscule one-bedroom after they got married because it was right smack on Beacon Street, in the pulsing heart of the Back Bay; but the prospect of wedging herself past the sink to reach the toilet for as long as she was unemployed was simply too depressing. That, and they'd soon be needing more room, with any luck.

She opened up her laptop and created a document called Moving Pros and Cons, but by ten-thirty in the morning she'd

gotten no further than the kitchen counter, where she was eating cold leftover noodles from the takeout carton when the doorbell buzzed.

“Oh, *hell*,” Katie blurted. She was still wearing Liam’s old Celtics T-shirt that she slept in, with nothing but panties underneath. People often pushed buttons at random until someone in the building let them in, but Katie dashed to the bedroom to pull on her sweatpants anyway, then rushed down the two flights of stairs and caught the delivery man just as he was turning to go.

She felt a twinge of something—indigestion, perhaps—as she accepted the box with its plain brown wrapping and Seamless logo (raised-print topstitching, very expensive) and signed the little keypad before heading back up the stairs. Liam had been eagerly anticipating this package ever since he’d visited the Seamless shop on Boylston, where a man redolent of aftershave spent half an hour taking measurements in a dressing room tricked out like a nineteenth-century haberdashery before charging Liam two hundred forty dollars and reminding him that “the pants of a lifetime” couldn’t be made overnight, but that in three weeks’ time a pair of trousers as unique as Liam himself would arrive at his door.

The pants could not be returned, of course, which was most unfortunate, since Katie was about to break it to Liam that their household income had just been cut in half. Back upstairs in the foyer of their tiny apartment, she bent over to set the box down next to the spittoon that Liam had insisted on buying on

their honeymoon and now used to toss his keys in, when the twinge became something else and, with utter and immediate clarity, she knew.

Her period had trumpeted its arrival with the twinge, the gut twist, the sudden gush.

Which meant that, once again, they had failed to make a baby this month. No adorable precious goddamn baby for Liam and Katie, the couple who had everything, the couple everyone envied.

Katie put her back against the wall and slid slowly down. They'd been here before—six times in a row, in fact. And of course, as disappointing as this was, it wasn't nearly as bad as her miscarriage last fall. Liam had been wonderful then, taking time off work to take care of her, binge watching three seasons of *Shameless* next to her on the couch. Since then, as the months ticked by, he'd grown less enchanted with the idea of "trying," had even balked a few times when the ovulation tracker called them to act, and while it was tempting to wonder if they'd missed their chance while he'd fallen asleep in front of the Patriots game, she could hardly blame him: their grim couplings no longer held much joy.

Still, they'd try again. Or they could have that conversation they'd danced around, about other possible sources of babies—there were lots of options, loads of them. But just for the moment, Katie was glad that Liam wasn't home, because she needed to be alone to let go of the little stash of forbidden hopes she'd been stockpiling: the starfish-shaped hands, the crisp eyelet of the christening gown Liam's sister was saving for

them, that exquisite shade of aquamarine she'd snipped from the color chart and taped to the bottom of her desk drawer because it was *perfect* for the baby's room, boy or girl.

The cramps got a little sharper. Katie had always had miserable periods, accompanied with lower back pain and bloating and irritability and nausea. She might as well just curl up on the couch with the remote until Liam got home. Maybe he would bring her sizzling rice soup and shortbread from Flourhouse, like last month—although he'd been working so much overtime lately that she probably shouldn't ask.

Katie's phone, sitting on the floor next to her, trilled. Her mother. Katie rolled her eyes out of habit, then reconsidered; maybe—just maybe—this was one of those rare moments when Georgina would prove to be exactly what she needed.

She picked the phone up and tapped the screen.

"Mom?" she croaked.

"What's the matter?" Instantly on alert, Georgina's voice drew up tight as the neck of a burlap sack. "Katie, honey, what is it?"

"It's—it's—" Katie snuffled into her sleeve.

"Oh, honey. Got your period again?"

You had to give Georgina that—not much got by her. Even during the two years during college when Katie quit speaking to her, Georgina had a knack for intuiting what was going on.

Katie mumbled a yes.

"You want me to come out for a visit?"

"No," Katie gasped. "Definitely not."

"Oh, well." Georgina clucked matter-of-factly. "I'd probably just make things worse. And I'm going to have my hands full."

“With what?” Katie asked, resigned to changing the subject, as every conversation with Georgina was about Georgina, no matter what else was happening. News of her unemployment would have to wait, which suited her just fine.

“Well—the nursing home called, and Margaret passed last night. Plus I’m supposed to host book club tonight, though I suppose I ought to cancel. Which is a shame, because—”

“Margaret?” Katie interrupted. “As in, *Grandma* Margaret?”

“Katie.” Georgina sighed. “You’ve never called her Grandma.”

“She signed her name that way when she wrote to me.”

“Which was what, all of two times? Listen, I refuse to pretend to be devastated by this. She was barely more than a stale piece of toast in a wheelchair after her stroke, anyway. At least now I don’t have to drive two hours to sit around watching them all drooling on their cardigans.”

“Oh, Mom,” Katie said. After a beat, she added, “Are you maybe a little bit sadder than you think?” *Deep inside, where you’ve stuffed all your feelings behind all those bourbon sours and plastic surgery?*

“No, pretty sure not,” Georgina said briskly. “I did all my mourning years ago. Like when I was six and she locked me in the basement because she didn’t want to listen to me *sneeze*. Listen, how about I send something nice? Maybe a case of wine?”

“Well, that would be a step up from last time,” Katie said drily. After her miscarriage, a package from the Dallas Neiman Marcus had arrived, containing a lace push-up bra and an enormous bottle of Clé de Peau, along with a computer-generated

note on the invoice that said “Feel Better Love Georgina.” “I mean . . . thanks, Mom.”

She was about to say “I love you,” something that still felt very unnatural, when her mother said thoughtfully, “It is strange, though, isn’t it? I mean, if my mother had died on the day a baby was *born*, the symbolism would be obvious. But I can’t quite figure out what to make of this.”

“It doesn’t mean anything at all,” Katie said shortly. She started to get up, going slow, helping herself with a hand on the wall. “Women get their periods every day. It hasn’t really even been all that long—our doctor won’t even discuss it until we’ve been trying a whole year.”

“Honey girl,” Georgina said, so tenderly that Katie started crying again. “Oh, my pretty little girl. I *do* love you, you know. More than you’ll ever know, until your own baby comes. Which she will. She *will*, darling. The next one’s going to stick.”

Katie smiled through her tears. “What about you? You sure you’re all right?”

“I’m fine,” Georgina said crisply, “other than I have no idea what I’m going to do with two dozen gorgonzola mini quiches and two pounds of shrimp.”



Chapter Two

November 1948
New London, Texas

Margaret Pierson was hiding in the coat closet, so close to the Daisy Club mothers gathering their coats and gloves that she could smell their perfumes. She was here to collect secrets—secrets she would record in her diary for further consideration, because if there was one thing that Margaret had learned in her eleven years on earth, it was that everyone had something they were hiding.

She was meant to be in the sunroom, saying goodbye to the other children, but three of them were boys and lately she had found their company unappealing. Boys were loud and reckless and often dirty, and worst of all, they seemed indifferent to her. Margaret had been accustomed to being the center of attention since—well, since as far back as she could remember, which was a sunny afternoon with all of these very same children.

Her mother, Caroline, insisted it wasn't possible for Mar-

garet to recall something that happened so long ago, but she distinctly remembered being set on her back on her parents' bed in a row with the others, their infant arms and legs waving in the air. She remembered being unable to move, to walk or even crawl, and having to depend on her mother to pick her up and move her about the house. She remembered dust motes dancing in the sunlight and watching the others, her fellow Daisy babies, though she did not know that name yet, grasping at the sparkling flecks.

And—on this point her mother burst into laughter—Margaret remembered thinking that the other babies were rather stupid to believe they could ever catch one.

Even then, her mother's amusement annoyed her. Margaret knew that there were certain unbreachable principles in the world, and sunlight illuminating specks that would otherwise be invisible was simply a fact. The babies had been lined up on the bed that day so that their photograph could be taken, the earliest group photo of the Daisy Club children. The photograph was now in a silver frame on the little curvy-legged table in the living room, and Caroline Pierson insisted that Margaret believed she remembered that day only because she'd grown up looking at the photograph.

So Margaret had stopped taking her mother into her confidence. Instead, she had turned her keen eye on the other adults in her life. She'd hidden herself in the coat closet when the luncheon started breaking up, and now she had a view of the foyer around the folds of Alelia's patched woolen coat, which she hung every morning when she came to work. Alelia had

taken the ladies' coats upstairs to the sewing room, as there wasn't room in the closet for all of them, and brought them back downstairs after the luncheon and even remembered which belonged to whom. Margaret watched the women huddle close together, whispering while they waited.

"I wish they'd just stop having it," Mrs. Sowell said. "It's been more than ten years now. Isn't it time?"

"Never," Mrs. Dial said fiercely. Her face, usually powdered and rouged to perfection, was mottled with rage. Her fingers were wrapped so tightly around the handle of her purse that the skin had turned white. "As long as I'm alive, no one is going to forget what happened that day."

Caroline Pierson made a clucking sound that Margaret knew well; she employed it to end arguments with her father. "There's lots of time to decide," she said in an overly bright voice. "Alice, don't forget to write down your deviled egg recipe. Hugh can't stop talking about them."

"If you don't want to be on the committee, you can always quit," Mrs. Dial snapped at Mrs. Sowell, unmollified. *That* was certainly interesting. People rarely ignored her mother.

Her mother stiffened for a moment, then put her hand firmly on Mrs. Sowell's shoulder and steered her toward the door. Once she was gone, Caroline closed the door a little more firmly than necessary and turned back to the others with a pained smile on her face.

"Don't give this another thought," Caroline told Mrs. Dial soothingly. She stood only inches away from the closet door, close enough that Margaret could count the houndstooth checks

on her skirt. “Of course there will be a Remembrance Day, and the Daisies will attend, as always. But you must remember that Alice lost more than most. She’s . . . vulnerable.”

“I don’t care,” Mrs. Dial retorted in a strangled voice. “I lost Ralph that day, she lost her three—what does it matter? We both lost our children. And now she wants to just sweep them all under the rug like they were nothing—nothing but—”

She broke off in muffled sobs, and Caroline patted her shoulder uncomfortably. Margaret knew that her mother despised public displays of emotion, and she felt ashamed for poor Mrs. Dial.

“What we must do,” Caroline said confidently once Mrs. Dial had composed herself, “is focus on the planning and not worry about our detractors. We have lots to do in the next few months. I could certainly use your help on the publicity committee, how does that sound? The others will come around—we’ll just work on making this Remembrance Day the best ever.”

“The best ever,” Mrs. Dial repeated, her face bearing the dazed expression of cattle in the railcars headed for the Fort Worth stockyards.

Margaret knew why Mrs. Dial was so sad. Her son Ralph had burned up in the same school explosion that had killed Margaret’s own sister, Ruby, along with hundreds of other children, when natural gas leaked out of the pipeline and built up in the school basement. Helene Dial had told Margaret that sometimes her mother stayed in bed all afternoon clutching a dirty, ragged old baby blanket that had belonged to Ralph.

Margaret and Helene—and all of the other Daisy children—

had been born to make their parents happy again. They arrived in the world as the new school was being constructed, and there was a newspaper picture of them, lined up in their mothers' arms, at the ribbon cutting ceremony when it opened.

In the photograph, all of the mothers were smiling at once—something that, as far as Margaret could tell, had never happened again.