

Chapter 1

When I woke up this morning, I didn't want to get out of bed. The 800-thread, cream-colored, satin sheets and red satin comforter I lay wrapped in gave me comfort that I didn't want to part with. I looked at the clock. Three o'clock! Now, Lord knows I don't get up at three o'clock in the morning. I rolled over to see Ty sleeping soundly in his blue satin pajamas I bought him for his birthday. He didn't feel me move. He was knocked out, which is what I would have expected at three in the morning on a Saturday. It was what I wanted to be and wasn't. He was sleeping so soundly I almost woke him up just because I was mad about being awake myself. I know that wouldn't have been a nice thing to do, but I did think about nudging him with my foot and acting like it was an accident when he woke up.

Since I was awake, of course, I had to get up to use the bathroom like everyone else does when they wake up in the middle of the night, so I slowly turned back around and reluctantly pushed the covers off to feel the chill of the morning in my sixty-six degree room. It's always sixty-six degrees in my bedroom when I awaken because my darling husband wouldn't have it any other way. The temperature is set on our thermostat and no one dares to change it without hearing from Mr. Chill. That's what I call him for more than one reason. He likes it cool, he's so laid back, but not when you change the thermostat setting. He also has a habit of telling people to "chill" when he thinks they need to calm down. Notice I said, "When he thinks," because he is always telling me to "chill" when I think I'm already chilled; I just have something to say.

I reached for my pink satin robe and slipped it on. It was dark with the lined, cream-colored drapes hanging over the window and the sliding glass door leading to the patio. I couldn't see a thing. I was obviously still asleep, since my brain acted as if it knew where nothing was set in my room, and I knocked into anything that could be knocked into on my way to the bathroom. I wanted to curse when I hit the baby toe on my right foot against that stupid chair Ty put in the wrong place. *I told him not to put that chair there.* I didn't curse though. I did one of those Fred Flintstone, "Frickem, Frackem" mumbles instead. *Why am I up anyway?* The question ran over and over in my mind since Saturday is the day that I am sure to sleep in at least until ten. When the kids were younger, I was up early on Saturdays, making sure they had something to eat and didn't jack the house up, leaving me to have to pick up when I got up. But they're older now, Hallelujah! So I can sleep in and that's what I try to do since Fridays are usually late nights, whether we're out or in. I sighed as I made it to the bathroom. I slid the door shut and turned on the light. I was trying to be nice this time and not wake Ty with the light, so I closed the door first. I looked in the mirror. There they were, those big bags sitting under my eyes. I looked like a boxer who had just lost a fight. I rolled my eyes, sighed, and shook my head.

Through the mirror I notice the aubergine towels I just bought yesterday hanging on the towel rack. I couldn't wait to put them in the bathroom. I loved the deep purple eggplant color; it's so rich. Of course, I liked it so much that I bought all the other stuff that matched: the rugs, the curtains, toilet covers, and other accessories. I thought it was just a beautiful place to be. After I had done what I needed to, I smiled at the beauty of the room and reached to turn off the light without looking in the mirror again. I didn't want to see my eyes again. Smile or no smile, I had bags. I slid the door open and waited a minute for my eyes to adjust. When they did, I proceeded to go back to bed. I took off my robe and jumped in quickly but quietly, trying not to move the bed too much. Ty moved slightly but didn't wake up. I looked back at the clock. It was three-ten.

Only ten minutes had passed, but I was definitely awake now. I turned on my right side facing my night stand and away from Ty, hoping I could get back to sleep, but that wasn't happening. "Forget it," I said in a huff as I pulled the covers back rough enough to almost wake up Ty. By now, I was a little upset

that I couldn't go back to sleep, but I couldn't do anything about it. I watched him sleep as I left the room. I thought, *what am I going to do at three-fifteen in the morning. It's still dark outside and everybody is still asleep.*

I went downstairs, sighing all the way. I walked through the living room and the great room to get to the kitchen. I put some hot water on the stove for some tea and stood in the kitchen like a half-asleep, half-awake zombie until the water was ready. I took it off before the pot whistled. *Maybe my Sleepy Time tea will put me back to sleep,* I thought. I sat at the kitchen table looking out the window at the neighbor's cat walking across the fence between our two yards. Their black, gold, and white calico looked fatter than she normally did. The chirp of the clock in the kitchen told me it was four o'clock. It shouted, "Its four o'clock and you're still awake!" I just sat there, frowning, and looked around the kitchen.

I looked around to see if there was anything missing that I needed to buy. I hadn't bought anything for the kitchen in a while since we got the new stainless steel refrigerator, gas stove, and trash compactor. The mahogany cabinetry with steel decorative handles looked beautiful, perfectly blending with the stainless steel appliances, burgundy, gray, and black granite countertops, and wood flooring painted black with three coats of shine. Everything was in its place and I couldn't see anything it needed. It was complete with nothing lacking, as materially my world was. "Why am I awake?" I looked back out of the window with my cheek in hand. It was four o'clock.

Three minutes later, the phone rang. Immediately I thought, *No one calls in the middle of the night unless there is an emergency or something tragic has already happened.* It rang a second time before I got up to answer it before it woke everyone else. I picked it up apprehensively.

"Hello," I said softly.

"Theresa," she shrieked.

"Yes." I couldn't make out the voice through the panic in the tone.

"Theresa, it's Kenny!" and that was all I could understand as the next words from my baby sister's mouth came amidst hysteria.

"Dana?"

"Yes."

"Wait! Wait! Wait! Slow down. Tell me again, I can't understand you."

She was crying immensely.

"Kenny got into a car accident and I'm at the hospital.

They are saying he may not make it and I don't know what to do. He had blood everywhere, and tubes, and ..."

"Dana, where are you?"

"At Sutter," she said sobbing. "I need you to come now, please."

She didn't know it, but I was already up the stairs and in my room with the light on, pulling jeans out of my closet with Tyrell asking me what was going on.

"Who is with the kids?" I questioned.

"Janie is home."

Janie is Dana's nineteen-year-old, in her second year at UC Berkeley and lives on campus. I forgot she was home.

"I'm on my way. Did you call Mama and Daddy?"

"No, you're the first."

"Okay, you just sit tight. Ty and I will be there in a minute. We'll call them on the way."

I hung up the cordless and dropped it on the leather ottoman in my closet as I grabbed my tennis shoes off the floor. By now, Ty was dressed in a pair of jeans and a shirt and was grabbing for tennis shoes and a jacket, even though he didn't yet know where we were going or for whom. When I dropped the phone he asked,

"What's going on?"

"Kenny has been in an accident. They say he may not make it. Dana's at the hospital by herself."

Ty looked stunned. I finished tying my shoes just as he grabbed the keys off the hook near the door and raced to Tina's room. He flung the door open and flicked on the light. I could hear him talking to her as I grabbed my purse downstairs and headed for the garage door off the kitchen. I was in the car and

opening the outer garage door before the two of them got to the garage. Ty jumped in the car and Tina said and motioned,

“Call me and let me know,” as we sped out.

Usually, when we're riding in the black Mercedes C350, I enjoy every minute of it. I can't tell you how often we're in it and I'm thinking, *this thing is bad. I can't hear the engine, and I can't feel the bumps in the road. I know that I look good in it. I know folks are checking us out.* But this morning, there was no glory in it at all. All I could think of was, *can we go any faster?*

Ty drove as fast as he could without getting a ticket. But who was going to give us a ticket at this time anyway? There wasn't anyone in sight. All the cops must have been getting coffee and donuts. I was sure that everyone was at home snoring. But my husband is who he is, and it really didn't matter if anyone was around or not, he tries to obey the rules the best he can. He's a good person. He's got a few quirks, but he's a good man.

I looked at my watch as we raced down the freeway. Donna Karan said it was four thirty-five. It would take another five minutes to get to the exit. I hurriedly slapped on some MAC. It was early, and there was a tragedy, but I wasn't going anywhere looking crazy. We didn't talk in the car. Ty exited the freeway at Bradshaw and we entered the hospital's emergency parking lot about ten to five. I know because I looked at my watch again. I've got this thing with time. I'm always looking at my watch. When things happen, I always know just about when they happened. When trying to recount when things happened, if I was there, everyone always says, “Ask Theresa. You know she'll be able to tell you when such and such happened.” We both flung the car doors open, and before I could close mine, Ty had already locked it with the remote. We ran toward the entrance, hand in hand. We slowed just in time as we almost ran into the automatic doors that didn't open fast enough.

We rushed to the admittance window and told the man who we were and that we were looking for Dana. He buzzed the door and told us to come right in. He then took us to a waiting area in the back of the facility that wasn't for those with minor emergencies.

As I turned the corner of the doorway, there was my baby sister sitting with someone from the hospital. She was still crying. She stood as we came in and fell into my arms. I got fuchsia pink cashmere all in my mouth from her sweater. It was cute, but it didn't taste good. Ty held us both. All three of us crying as the hospital personnel looked on for the next minute or so. Those minutes of comforting passed before we moved on to asking pertinent questions. Ty asked the first question.

“Have you heard anything else?”

“No,” Dana said, still crying, the hospital liaison shaking her head.

I asked, “What happened?”

In the midst of her tears she said, “He was coming home from a trip on Interstate 5 and a big rig came over the lane and hit him. The driver fell asleep.”

I sighed from inner pain and held her. A minute later, a doctor came in the door. We all stood in hopes that he was bringing us good news, but he didn't.

“Mrs. Richards,” he said, looking at Dana. “I'm so sorry, but we weren't able to save your husband's life.”

I have never before heard the sound that came from the depths of Dana's being. It was a moan, but it was a roar, and as it came out of her, she collapsed back into her seat. I held her in my own numbness as Ty spoke briefly with the doctor.

I thought, *this is not happening. This is not happening.* But it was.

It was, as people say when something like this happens, like a movie. Suddenly, everything was moving in slow motion. I could hear people talking, but it was muffled. I was in shock and my mind held on to nothing. I can't remember thinking anything for several moments that felt like a lifetime. Everything was just blank.

We had just been told that my brother-in-law, my sister's husband, high school sweetheart, and first and only love was dead. He had been killed by injuries from an accident, and that was that. This morning had joined the ranks of what I considered to be the worst mornings of my life and I couldn't change it. There was no rewind button that I could push to go back in time and change anything. No one could go back to the night before and convince Kenny to stay wherever he was until day or to not drive in the wee

hours of the morning. This was done, Kenny was gone, and my sister was now a devastated widow. Ty and I were in shock. I didn't want to think about how we would tell the kids, hers and mine.

I felt as if I had been gut-punched. Like when Sheila Birch socked me in the stomach in the fifth grade. That hurt like heck, and even though I beat her down afterward, I still felt the pain for a while. I was able to hide it until I got home, but once I was home, I just rolled on the floor until it stopped. This was different because I didn't know when this pain was going to stop.

I held Dana's jerking body. She hadn't stopped whaling. Ty exclaimed, "Damn!" while putting his fist in the wall. Everyone in the room jumped, as we weren't expecting his response. He quickly apologized to everyone present and said that he just couldn't believe it.

After a few minutes, Dana calmed a bit and the doctor walked over to Dana to say again how sorry he was. Dana didn't respond. He looked at us with tears in his eyes, told us to let a staff member know if we needed him, and left the room. The other hospital worker left also after telling us that she would return in a few minutes. Just then, my cell phone rang. It was Tina. I looked at the time on the phone.

"Mom?"

"Yes."

"Is everything okay?" she asked. "Is Uncle Kenny alright?" I paused.

"Mom?"

I motioned to Ty to take my place with Dana. As he did, I stepped outside the door into the sterile white hall of the hospital. *Why haven't they softened the colors in this place like they have in other hospitals?* Closing my eyes and tearing, I said, "No, baby, your Uncle Kenny isn't all right. Uncle Kenny is dead."

There it was; I said it. It didn't sound right. It didn't feel right. I'd heard the words come out of my mouth and my mind knew it was true, but my heart didn't want to believe it. It wanted to reject the notion entirely, but couldn't. There was silence on the phone for a few moments then, "Kiss Auntie Dana for me and tell her that I love her."

"Okay baby. We'll be home in a bit."

"Okay, she said quietly."

She hung up, so I did too. Tina, short for Christina, is sixteen, but very mature for her age. I didn't have to ask her not to tell her brothers. I knew that she wouldn't. I knew she would wait for us to return home to tell them. I put my phone back in my navy blue Coach bag and reentered the waiting room.

Dana had stopped sobbing and was just sitting back in her chair, motionless. I stood there at the door looking at her sitting with a blank stare. Ty by her side. I heard footsteps and just as I turned around, our parents hit the doorway. My daddy hugged me. My mother headed straight for Dana and pulled her into her arms. Ty let her go willingly. Dana looked up at my mother and began to cry again.

"So, have you heard anything?" my father asked Ty and I.

"Daddy, Kenny is dead," I said softly.

My mother, hearing me, instantly donned a look of wonder, shock, and astonishment. Dana cried all the more with Mother rocking her. "Dear Father," my father said. With tears flowing down her cocoa-colored cheeks, Mother asked, "What happened?"

I knew that she wasn't really asking the question for an answer. She was thinking out loud. But since she heard her, Dana answered.

"He was on his way home and a big rig driver fell asleep and crossed over the median and hit him just after three o'clock," Dana said bluntly.

I gasped in myself.

Three o'clock! She did not just say a little after three o'clock. That's the time I woke up trying to figure out why I was awake. The next few minutes, I was back in my own world. I didn't hear the rest of my family's conversation for at least five minutes. My mind was reeling.

She said his accident happened just after three o'clock. This was the first time it had dawned on me that there could have been a connection between Kenny's accident and my waking up early this morning.

Oh my God! Was I supposed to have done something? Why did I wake up just before it happened? Was there something I was supposed to do? Would he be alive now if I had done something other than having been angry about being awake, drinking tea, and looking out of the kitchen window? I had all of these

questions, but no answers. Kenny's death hurt me deeply, but it would be even more devastating to know that I could have made a difference in the outcome.

I mean, I had thought before for a quick second, *was there anything anyone could have done to change this tragedy, like talking to him the night before*. But I knew that there was no way anyone could have known ahead of time that this would happen, and I was able to quickly release everyone of any kind of responsibility. But now, this was different. This didn't seem to be a coincidence. She said three o'clock, and I woke up at three o'clock. This felt like the two events were linked.

"Theresa. Theresa."

I could hear someone calling my name, but it was like I was in a coma and couldn't respond. I was just deep in thought and suddenly realized that Mother was calling my name. She must have said it more than a few times because when I finally acknowledged her with a glance, they were all looking at me intently, including Dana.

"Are you okay?" Mother said.

With my mouth slightly open and I'm sure a perplexing daze on my face, I said "yes," knowing that I was not at all okay. Donna Karan told me it was five thirteen.