

Prologue
TROUBLE BREWING

Poway
2013

“Shit. Shit. Shit.”

I flip on my headlights and see the cop just as he sees me.

It’s a dark and cool evening in March, around eight o’clock—a school night. After an uncomfortable dinner with family, I exited the restaurant parking lot and realized my lights were off. I take a deep breath, trying to calm my galloping heart, and sit at the intersection watching the driver of the black-and-white watch me. When the light turns green, I slowly turn onto the main road and check my rearview mirror.

Welp. There he is. A few cars back.

I stretch across the passenger seat to grab gum from my purse as panic rises in my chest. Sweat soaks my padded bra, drenching the sleeveless blouse I put on this morning. Those have been a wardrobe staple since menopause took over my forties. I’ve had my share of wine tonight, but I’m certainly not drunk. Maybe a little buzzed.

This moment is one I’ve feared for years, every time I picked up one of our daughters from volleyball practice or dance class, after having a little wine with dinner. I’ve often passed deputies hiding down side streets or behind trees near our house and panicked.

But I’ve never been pulled over before.

“Dear God, please let Eclipse Cool Peppermint cover up wine breath. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

I round the corner, crossing myself, and sinking my teeth into one small square of minty fresh hope, before daring to look into the rearview mirror again.

There he is. Just two cars back now.

Damn it! Why didn't you check the headlights when you picked up the car today?

After the awkward meal with my husband, parents, and our two youngest daughters, I left The Brigantine feeling distracted and uneasy about the state of my marriage. My husband and I are barely speaking this week, and it's getting harder to pretend everything is fine in front of an audience. I think my mom and dad sense the trouble brewing, but I'm hopeful the girls haven't noticed. Our eldest is away at college and blissfully oblivious.

We all left the restaurant heading in different directions, and I'm driving home alone in a fifteen-year-old Mercedes, recently handed down to me by my mother. This dinosaur needs too much maintenance, but at least it's paid for. One less monthly payment is a godsend.

Suddenly, the cruiser is behind me, its siren roaring, and blue lights flashing, lighting up the old Mercedes, and broadcasting my stupidity to the entire neighborhood.

Goddamn it!

My foot shakes against the gas pedal as I lurch the enormous white sedan back into the same shopping center parking lot, this time at the supermarket end. I pull into a space as far away from the entrance as possible, and scramble to button up the jeans I had released after dinner.

At forty-nine, I'm a 24/7 sweaty mess, and all of my jeans are too tight, but I can't wear a sweater to cover my expanding waistline because I'm too damn hot all the time.

Rolling down the window, I take in the chilly air gratefully and scan the Stater Brothers parking lot, praying no one from PTA is here buying cupcakes for school tomorrow.

Contemplating the unthinkable. Am I about to get a DUI? I'm not *that* buzzed, am I?

Shit. Who knows.

