

Jude Deveraux



LEGEND

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Chapter 1

I look like a chocolate meringue pie,” Kady said as she grimaced at her reflection in the tall three-sided mirror. With her dark hair and ivory skin above the absolute white of the frothy wedding dress, she did indeed remind herself of chocolate and whipped egg whites. Cocking her head to one side, she reconsidered. “Or maybe a chicken dumpling. I can’t decide which.”

From behind her, Debbie, who had been at cooking school with Kady, laughed softly, but Jane did not.

“I don’t want to hear another word like that,” Jane said sternly. “You hear me, Kady Long? Not one more word! You are absolutely gorgeous and you full well know it.”

“Gregory certainly knows it,” Debbie said, her eyes wide as she surveyed Kady in the mirror. As one of Kady’s two bridesmaids, she’d flown to Virginia from northern California the night before and had only met Kady’s fiancé this morning. She was still reeling from the experience. Gregory Norman was one terrific-looking man: his face and body all hard angles and planes, with dark hair and eyes that looked at a woman as though to say he’d very much like to make love to her. When he’d raised Debbie’s fingertips to

his beautiful lips and kissed them, Debbie's upper lip had broken into a sweat.

"How can I walk down the aisle looking like this?" Kady asked, holding out what had to be fifty yards of heavy satin. "And look at these sleeves: they're bigger than I am. And the skirt!" With horror in her eyes, she looked down at the acres of white satin puddling about her, a pearl encrusted border sparkling on the seven or so inches of hem that bent into an overflow on the floor.

"Any of these dresses can be altered," said the tall, thin saleswoman, who with her stiff stance let Kady know that she didn't appreciate having her bridal salon's wares denigrated.

Kady hadn't meant to give offense. "It's not the dresses; it's *me*. Why can't the human body be like bread dough so we could shape it however we want? Add a little here, take a little off there."

"Kady," Jane warned. They had known each other all their lives, and she could not bear to hear Kady say anything derogatory about herself; she loved her too much to allow that.

But Debbie giggled. "Or as stretchy as pizza dough," she said, looking at Kady in the mirror. "Then we could elongate what was too short, and leave lumps where we wanted them."

When Kady laughed, Debbie was quite pleased with herself. They had gone to culinary school in New York together, but Debbie had always been in awe of Kady. While other students were trying to learn techniques and how to blend flavors, Kady just seemed to know. She could look at a recipe and tell how it was going to taste; she could eat a meal she hadn't cooked, then later re-create it exactly. While other students were juggling recipe cards and trying to remember the difference between scones and biscuits, Kady threw things into a bowl, dumped them onto a sheet pan, put them into an oven, and they came out divine. Needless to say, at school Kady was the darling of all the teachers and the envy of every student. Debbie had been flattered beyond all reasoning when Kady had asked *her* if she'd like to go to a movie and thus started their friendship.

Now, five years later, both she and Kady were thirty years old.

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Debbie had married, had a couple of children, and her culinary talents were mostly directed toward peanut-butter sandwiches and barbecued ^{steaks} on weekends. But that's not the way Kady's life had gone. After school Kady had shocked—and horrified—all the other students and her teachers by accepting a job at a run-down steak house called Onions located in Alexandria, Virginia. Her teachers had tried to persuade her to accept one of the many job offers she received from fabulous restaurants in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and even Paris. But she'd turned them down flat. And everyone had said what a shame it was for someone with Kady's talent to waste herself in that nothing little steak house.

But Kady had had the last laugh because she'd turned Onions into a three-star restaurant. People came from all over the world to eat at her tables. If a diplomat, jet-setter, or even an in-the-know tourist visited the eastern seaboard, he made sure he went to Kady's Place, as it was affectionately known.

And what made the food world especially envious was that Kady had done it her way. She'd been determined to bring people to her food, not to the restaurant itself. Today, Onions was still in need of refurbishing; it was tiny, seating only twenty-five people at once, and it accepted no reservations. Nor did it have a menu. People came and stood in line and waited until a table was empty, then they ate whatever Kady had decided to cook that night.

Debbie would never forget the video on the six o'clock news that seemed to amuse Peter Jennings so much. In it was President Clinton waiting in line outside Onions, talking to the king of some African country, both of them surrounded by hungry tourists and locals, while Secret Service men looked on in wild-eyed fear, anticipating danger.

Now, as Debbie looked at Kady in her wedding dress, she saw only her talented, pretty friend. Besides being an extraordinary cook, Kady had one of the most beautiful faces she'd ever seen. As far as Debbie knew, Kady had no idea how to apply mascara, but then why should she when she had lashes that thick and that

black? And long, thick hair so dark and shiny you could almost apply your lipstick in its reflection. "Good diet," Kady always said, tongue in cheek, whenever anyone said she was pretty.

Although her face was exceptionally pretty, Kady had what the fashion magazines described as a "figure problem."

Kady was about five feet two inches tall, had a size twelve top and bottom and a size four waist. In school she'd always worn her chef's coat, a long, double-breasted jacket that went almost to her knees, completely concealing her waist, so she looked like a pretty face set atop a burrito. It wasn't until a school Halloween party, when Kady had shown up dressed as a streetwalker, that anyone had seen her little waist—and had seen her exaggerated hourglass figure. After that night several of the male students had made passes at Kady, but later, after she'd corrected their soufflés and crêpes, they left her alone. "Gets them every time," Kady had whispered to Debbie, adding that she was waiting for a man she loved as much as she loved cooking.

And now she'd found him. Gregory Norman was the drop-dead gorgeous son of the widow who owned Onions, the woman who had so very wisely hired Kady. It was rumored that when Kady refused to allow the President of the United States into her restaurant ahead of a family of tourists from Iowa, Mrs. Norman had had to be revived with smelling salts. But later, after Mrs. Norman received a handwritten note from the President thanking Mrs. Norman and Kady for such a wonderful meal, Mrs. Norman had in turn thanked Kady by paying the extravagant bill for the white truffles Kady had ordered without one complaint, nor even a sarcastic remark. It was said that keeping her mouth shut had probably taken five years off Mrs. Norman's life.

"You can't wear *that* dress, that's for sure," Jane said in a nonsense way. "Actually, you can't be seen in any of these." As she spoke she glared at the saleswoman, daring her to comment. "Come on, get out of that thing, and let's go to lunch."

"I've heard of a new place about twenty miles—" Debbie began, but Jane halted her.

"Don't even try. Our Kady will eat nowhere except at an

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American deli. No one else can cook food good enough for her, isn't that right, Miss Picky?"

Kady laughed as she struggled out of the voluminous dress. "Delis have good, simple food. It is what it is."

"Ha! You just don't like anyone else's cooking, that's what. Come on, let's go."

Debbie was bewildered at the way Jane bossed Kady around, for to her, Kady was a bit of a celebrity, at least she was in the food world, since she was always being mentioned in those heavenly food magazines. "Food pornography," as Kady called them. "Sinfully rich and sinfully delicious to our weight-conscious society."

Twenty minutes later the three women were seated at tiny tables in a frantically busy deli, eating turkey breast sandwiches.

"So!" Jane said. "I feel a little guilty, having arrived days earlier, so why don't you tell Debbie all about your fiancé? In fact, I forgot all about the love part of all this."

At that Kady rolled her eyes. Jane was an accountant, and for the last two days the finances of the restaurant and Kady's bank account had been Jane's number one concern.

"Yes, do tell me," Debbie encouraged. "Tell me all about Gregory. Kady, he really is the most beautiful of men. Is he a model?"

"More important," Jane said with a secretive look, "how does he look with his face veiled?"

"What?" Debbie asked, leaning forward, looking puzzled.

"Since she was a child, Kady has . . ." Halting, Jane looked at her friend. "Stop sitting there looking like the cat that ate the canary and tell us *all*. Was it love at first sight?"

"More like 'love at first bite,'" Kady said, smiling, her eyes dreamy as they always were when she thought of the man she loved. "As you know, Gregory is Mrs. Norman's only child, but he lives in Los Angeles, where he's a high-powered real estate agent. He buys and sells those five-million-dollar houses for the movie stars, so he's pretty busy. He's only been back to Virginia once in the five years I've been here." After she said this, she glanced at

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Jane to make sure she'd heard. Financial solvency was what Jane considered a man's most important feature. "The one time he was here was the week I was in Ohio visiting my parents, so I missed meeting him."

Kady smiled in memory. "But six months ago, early one Sunday morning, I was at the restaurant with my knives and—" 停

At this Jane gave a snort of laughter, and Debbie tittered. Kady never, never allowed anyone to touch her precious knives. She kept them sharp enough to split an eyelash, lengthwise, and heaven help anyone who picked up one of her knives and used it to do something like, say, scrape a cutting board.

"Okay," Kady said, smiling, then turned to Debbie. "My dear friend here has for years been trying to make me believe that there is life outside a kitchen. But I have told her that, due to something called hunger, life comes to the kitchen." She looked back at Jane. "And it did. It came in the form of one Gregory Norman."

"Some great form," Debbie said under her breath, making Kady smile.

"Anyway, as I was saying, before I was so rudely interrupted, I was in the kitchen at the restaurant, and in walked Gregory. Right away I knew who he was, since Mrs. Norman has shown me at least three point one million photos of him and has told me everything about him from the time he was born. But I don't think he knew who I was."

"Thought you were the scullery maid, did he?" Jane asked. "And what did you have on? Torn jeans and one of those shapeless coats of yours?"

"Of course. But Gregory didn't notice. He'd arrived from LA late the night before and he'd been out jogging, so he was sweaty and very hungry. He asked if I knew if there was any cereal or something he could eat for breakfast. So I told him to sit down and I'd make him something."

After that, Kady took a big bite of her sandwich and looked as though she were planning to say no more.

Debbie broke the silence. "Your pancakes?"

"Actually, crepes. With strawberries."

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"Poor man," Jane said seriously. "He didn't have a chance." She leaned forward. "Kady, dear, I can fully understand that he fell in love with you, but are you in love with him? You aren't marrying him because he gushes over your food, are you?"

"I haven't agreed to ~~marry~~ the other men who have eaten my food, then asked me to marry them, now have I?"

Debbie laughed. "Have there been many?"

Jane answered. "According to Mrs. Norman, there's one a night, men from all over the world. What was it that sultan offered you?"

"Rubies. Mrs. Norman said she was glad he didn't offer me an herb farm or she feared I might go with him."

"What did Gregory offer you?"

"Just himself," Kady said. "Jane, please stop worrying. I love Gregory very much." For a moment, Kady closed her eyes. "The last six months have been the best of my life. Gregory has courted me like something out of a novel, with flowers and candy and attention. He listens to all my ideas about Onions, and he has told his mother that I'm to have carte blanche when it comes to buying ingredients. I didn't tell anyone, but in the months before Gregory returned, I was thinking about leaving Onions and opening my own restaurant."

"But now you're staying. So does that mean Gregory is going to leave LA and live here with you?" Jane asked.

"Yes. We're buying a town house in Alexandria, one of those beautiful three-story places with a garden, and Gregory is going to get into real estate here in Virginia. He won't make as much money as he did in LA, but . . ."

"It's love," Debbie said. "Any babies planned?"

"As soon as possible," Kady said softly, then blushed and looked down at her coleslaw, which had too much fennel in it.

"But how does he look in a face veil?" Jane asked again.

"You must tell me," Debbie said, when Kady didn't answer right away. "What is this about a face veil?"

"May I?" Jane asked, then when Kady nodded, she continued. "Kady's widowed mother worked a couple of jobs, so Kady stayed with us most of the day and she was like part of our family. She

used to have—” She looked at Kady, one eyebrow raised. “Still does?” Kady nodded. “Anyway, all her life Kady has had a dream about an Arabian prince.”

“I don’t know who he is,” Kady interrupted, looking at Debbie. “It’s just a dream I have. It’s nothing.”

“Nothing, ha! You know what she did all the years she was growing up? She drew veils across the lower half of every man’s photo she saw. My father used to threaten her within an inch of her life, because he’d open *Time* magazine or *Fortune* and, if Kady had seen it first, she’d have blacked out the bottom half of each man’s face. She carried black markers with her wherever she went.” Jane leaned toward Debbie. “When she grew up, she put the markers in the case with her *knives*.”

“She still does,” Debbie said. “At school we all wondered what her black markers were for. Darryl once said—” She gave a look at Kady, then broke off.

“Go on,” Kady said. “I can bear it. Ever since he heard me say that he couldn’t even fry a chicken, Darryl has not exactly been my friend. What did he say about my markers?”

“That you used them to write letters to the devil because that’s the only way you could cook the way you do.” *Th. L.*

Both Kady and Jane laughed.

“So tell me about the man with the veiled face,” Debbie encouraged, and this time Jane nodded for Kady to tell her own story.

“It’s nothing really. When I was growing up, I was *obsessed* with finding this man.” She looked at Jane. “And now I think I have. Gregory looks very much like him.”

“Him who?” Debbie said, frustrated. “Either tell me or I’ll make you eat processed cheese!”

“I never knew you had such a streak of cruelty,” Kady said dryly, then, “Okay, okay. I have a recurring dream, and it’s always the same. I’m standing in a desert and there is a man sitting on a white horse, one of those beautiful Arabian horses. The man is wearing a robe of black wool. He’s looking at me, but I can only see

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his eyes because the lower half of his face is covered with a black cloth."

For a moment, Kady's voice became soft as she thought of the dream man who had been such a compelling part of her life. "He has unusual, almond-shaped eyes. The outer lids dip down just slightly, so they give him a look of sadness, as though he has seen more pain than a person should have seen."

Abruptly, Kady came back to the present and smiled at Debbie. "He never says anything, but I can tell that he wants something from me and he's waiting for me to do something. Every time it frustrates me that I don't know what he wants. After a moment he holds out his hand to me. It's a beautiful, strong hand, with long fingers and tanned skin."

In spite of herself, Kady felt the power of the dream even as she told the story. If she'd had the dream only once or twice, she would have been able to forget about it, but there had never been a week since she was nine years old that she hadn't had the dream. It was always exactly the same, with not the tiniest variation.

Her voice grew so quiet that both Jane and Debbie had to lean forward to hear her. "Always, I try to take his hand. More than anything in the world I want to jump on that horse and ride away with him. I want to go wherever he is going, to be with him forever, but I can't. I can't reach his hand. I try to, but there is too much distance between us. After a while his eyes show infinite sadness, and he withdraws his hand, then rides away. He rides as though he is part of the horse. After a long moment he halts his horse, then turns back for just a second and looks at me as though he hopes I will change my mind and go with him. Each time I call out to him not to leave me, but he never seems to hear. He looks even sadder, then turns and rides away."

Kady leaned back in her chair. "And that's the end of the dream."

"Oh, Kady," Debbie said, "that gives me goose bumps. And you think Gregory is your Arabian prince in real life?"

"He is dark like him, and from the first moment, we were

attracted to each other, and since he proposed marriage, I have been having the dream every other night. I think that's a sign, don't you?"

"I think it's a sign that it's time for you to leave your life of food and men on white stallions and join the real world," Jane said.

"I never looked," Kady answered.

"What?"

"I never looked under the horse to see if it was a stallion or not. Could be a mare. Or maybe a gelding. But then how do you tell if it has been gelded?"

"I'm sure that if people ate horse meat, then you would know," Jane said, making the other two women laugh.

Debbie gave a great sigh. "Kady, I think that may be the most romantic story I have ever heard. I definitely think you should marry your Arabian prince."

"What I want to know is what you are making poor Gregory wear to the wedding. A black robe?"

Kady and Debbie laughed; then Kady said, "My dear Gregory may wear as little or as much as he wants to the wedding. He isn't thirty pounds overweight."

"And neither are you," Jane snapped.

"Tell that to the woman selling wedding dresses."

Jane started to reply, but then a busboy began to clean their table, broadly hinting that it was needed and they should leave. In a few minutes, the three women were back out on the streets of Alexandria. Jane looked at her watch. "Debbie and I need to do some shopping at Tyson's Corner, so shall we meet you back at Onions at five?"

"Sure," Kady said hesitantly, then grimaced. "I have a whole list of things I'm supposed to buy for the town house. Things that don't go into the kitchen."

"You mean like sheets and towels, that sort of thing?"

"Yes," Kady said brightly, hoping Jane and Debbie would volunteer to help her with this incomprehensible task. But luck wasn't with her.

"Debbie and I have to pool our money and get you something

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nice for a wedding gift, and we can't do that with you around. Come on, don't look so glum. We'll help you look for sheets tomorrow."

"Isn't there a rather nice cookware shop in Alexandria?" Debbie asked, thinking she'd much prefer to go cookware shopping with Kady than gift purchasing with Jane.

"I believe there ^{is}," Kady said, laughing. "I never thought of that. Maybe I can find a way to occupy myself after all." It was obvious that she was joking and that she'd intended all along to visit the kitchenware shop.

"Come on," Jane said, taking Debbie's arm. "No doubt poor Gregory will be sleeping on cookie sheets and drying with waxed paper."

"Parchment paper," Debbie and Kady said in unison, a chef's inside joke that made Jane groan as she pulled Debbie away.

Smiling, Kady watched her two friends go, then breathed a sigh of relief. It had been years since she'd seen Jane, and she'd forgotten by half how bossy she was. And she'd also forgotten how worshipful Debbie was.

Looking about her at the beautiful fall sunshine, for a moment Kady didn't quite know what to do with herself. She had hours of freedom. And that freedom had been given to her by her dear, darling Gregory. For all that Gregory was heavenly, so kind and so considerate, his mother was a tartar. Mrs. Norman never took an afternoon off, so it never occurred to her that Kady should have time off either.

But then, truthfully, Kady didn't have many interests outside the kitchen. On Sundays and Mondays, when Onions was closed, Kady was in the kitchen experimenting and perfecting recipes for the cookbook she was writing. So, even though she'd lived in Alexandria for five years, she didn't know her way around very well. Of course she knew where the best cookware shop was and where to buy any produce imaginable and who was the best butcher, but, truthfully, where did one buy sheets? For that matter, where did one buy any of the things that Gregory said they'd need for their house? He'd said he'd leave all that up to her because he knew how

important such things were to a woman. Kady had said, "Thank you," and had not told him she had no idea how to buy curtains and rugs.

She had, however, spent a bit of time redesigning the kitchen of the town house into a two-room masterpiece, with one area for baking and another for bone-burning, as the pastry cooks called the work of entrée chefs. The two rooms, one L shaped, the other U shaped, met on either side of a big granite-topped table, where Kady could beat the heck out of brioche dough and hurt nothing. There was open storage and closed storage and . . .

She trailed off, letting out a sigh. She had to stop thinking about cooking and kitchens and think about the problems at hand. What in the world was she going to wear to her own wedding? It was all well and good to be in love with a gorgeous man, but she didn't want to hear people say, "What's a hunk like him see in a dumpling like her?" Debbie and Jane had been so nice to fly to Virginia to try on bridesmaids' dresses and help Kady choose her dress, when they needed to return in six weeks for the wedding itself. But the three of them weren't making any headway. Seeing herself in that mirror this morning had made Kady want to skip the whole thing. Couldn't she just wear her chef's coat to the wedding? It was white.

While she was thinking, her legs carried her to a certain cookware shop that never failed to have something Kady could use. An hour later she exited with a French tart cutter in the shape of an apple. It wasn't a wedding veil, but it would last longer, she told herself, then started toward the parking lot and her car. It was early yet, but there were always things to do at the restaurant and, besides, Gregory might be there.

Smiling, she began to walk but stopped in front of an antique shop. In the window was an old copper mold in the shape of a rose. As though hypnotized, she opened the shop door, making the bell jangle. Reaching past an antique table and a cast-iron cat, she took the mold from the window, saw it was something she could afford, then looked around for a clerk to pay.

There was no one in the shop. *What if I were a thief?* she thought.