



#1 *New York Times*
BESTSELLING AUTHOR

SOPHIE KINSELLA

*Can You
Keep a Secret?*

S O P H I E K I N S E L L A

Can You Keep
a Secret?



A D E L L B O O K

CAN YOU KEEP A SECRET?
A Dell Book

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**Praise for
CAN YOU KEEP A SECRET?**

"Venturing beyond Saks and Barney's, the bestselling author of *Confessions of a Shopaholic* and *Shopaholic Ties the Knot* entertains readers with backstabbing office shenanigans, competition, scandal, love and sex. . . . Kinsella's down-to-earth protagonist is sure to have readers sympathizing and doubled over in laughter."

—*Publishers Weekly*

"Chick lit at its lightest and breeziest . . . filled with fabulous clothes, stalwart friends and snotty enemies waiting to be taken down a peg."

—*Orlando Sentinel*

"[Kinsella's] dialogue is sharp, even her minor characters are well drawn, and her parody of the marketing world is very funny."

—*Washington Post Book World*

"[A] comedic frenzy of ill-fated events . . . punchy . . . fast-moving."

—*Rocky Mountain News*

"Kinsella's witty take on mundane office and family life will really make you laugh out loud. Move over, Bridget [Jones]!"

—*Evening Chronicle* (UK)

"Hilarious."

—*Sun* (UK)

"Kinsella's light touch keeps this very funny look at life and relationships flying along and builds Emma into a genuinely endearing character. Romantic, but refreshingly witty."

—*Sunday Mirror* (UK)

“Like a riotous gossip with your best friend—it’ll have you laughing, cringing and hopelessly engrossed from the first page.” —*Scottish Daily Record & Sunday Mail*

Praise for Sophie Kinsella’s Shopaholic Novels

“A hilarious tale . . . hijinks worthy of classic *I Love Lucy* episodes . . . too good to pass up.” —*USA Today*

“[Sophie Kinsella] gives chick-lit lovers a reason to stay home from the mall.” —*Entertainment Weekly*

“Kinsella’s Bloomwood is plucky and funny. . . . You won’t have to shop around to find a more winning protagonist.” —*People*

“Don’t wait for a sale to buy this hilarious book.” —*Us Weekly*

“Perfect for anyone wishing that bank statements came in more colours than just black and red.” —*The Mirror* (London)

“If a *crème brûlée* could be transmogrified into a book, it would be *Confessions of a Shopaholic*.” —*Star-Ledger* (Newark)

“Kinsella’s heroine is blessed with the resilience of ten women, and her damage-limitation brain waves are always good for a giggle.” —*Glamour* (UK)

"A have-your-cake-and-eat-it romp, done with brio and not a syllable of moralizing . . . Kinsella has a light touch and puckish humor."
—*Kirkus Reviews*

"For anyone with a love-hate relationship with their flexible friend."
—*Company* (UK)

"This book is an indulgence that's definitely worth every penny."
—*New Woman* (UK)

"Never has so much been bought by one woman as by shopaholic Rebecca."
—*Hello!* (UK)

ALSO BY SOPHIE KINSELLA

Confessions of a Shopaholic

Shopaholic Takes Manhattan

Shopaholic Ties the Knot

Shopaholic & Sister

Shopaholic & Baby

The Undomestic Goddess

Remember Me?

To H, from whom I have no secrets. Well, not many.

One

OF COURSE I have secrets.

Of course I do. Everyone has a few secrets. It's completely normal.

I'm not talking about big, earth-shattering secrets. Not the-president-is-planning-to-bomb-Japan-and-only-Will-Smith-can-save-the-world type secrets. Just normal, everyday little secrets.

Like, for example, here are a few random secrets of mine, off the top of my head:

1. My Kate Spade bag is a fake.
2. I love sweet sherry, the least cool drink in the universe.
3. I have no idea what NATO stands for. Or even exactly what it is.
4. I weigh 128 pounds. Not 118, like my boyfriend, Connor, thinks. (Although, in my defense, I was planning to go on a diet when I

- told him that. And, to be fair, it is only one number different.)
5. I've always thought Connor looks a bit like Ken. As in Barbie and Ken.
 6. Sometimes, when we're right in the middle of passionate sex, I suddenly want to laugh.
 7. I lost my virginity in the spare bedroom with Danny Nussbaum while Mum and Dad were downstairs watching *Ben-Hur*.
 8. I've already drunk the wine that Dad told me to save for twenty years.
 9. Sammy the goldfish at home isn't the same goldfish that Mum and Dad gave me to look after when they went to Egypt.
 10. When my colleague Artemis really annoys me, I feed her plant orange juice. (Which is pretty much every day.)
 11. I once had this weird lesbian dream about my flatmate Lissy.
 12. My G-string is hurting me.
 13. I've always had this deep-down conviction that I'm not like everybody else, and there's an amazingly exciting new life waiting for me just around the corner.
 14. I have no idea what this guy in the gray suit is going on about.
 15. Plus, I've already forgotten his name.

And I only met him ten minutes ago.

"We believe in multi-logistical formative alliances," he's saying in a nasal, droning voice, "both above and below the line."

"Absolutely!" I reply brightly, as though to say "Doesn't everybody?"

Multi-logistical. What does that mean, again?

Oh, God. What if they ask me?

Don't be stupid, Emma. They won't suddenly demand, What does "multi-logistical" mean? I'm a fellow marketing professional, aren't I? Obviously I know these things.

And anyway, if they mention it again, I'll change the subject. Or I'll say I'm post-logistical or something.

The important thing is to keep confident and businesslike. I can do this. This is my big chance, and I'm not going to screw it up.

I'm sitting in the offices of Glen Oil's headquarters in Glasgow, and as I glance at my reflection in the window, I look just like a top businesswoman. My shoulder-length hair is straightened, after half an hour with the hair dryer and a bottle of serum this morning. I'm wearing discreet gold swirl earrings like they tell you to in how-to-win-that-job articles. And I've got on my smart new Jigsaw suit. (At least, it's practically new. I got it from the Cancer Research shop and sewed on a button to replace the missing one, and you can hardly tell.)

I'm here representing the Panther Corporation, which is where I work. The meeting is to finalize a promotional arrangement between the new cranberry-flavored Panther Prime sports drink and Glen Oil, and I flew up this morning from London, especially.

When I arrived, the two Glen Oil marketing guys started on this long, show-offy "who's traveled the most?" conversation about air miles and the red-eye to Washington—and I think I bluffed pretty convincingly. But the truth is, this is the first time I've ever had to travel for work.

OK. The *real* truth is, this is the first business meeting I've attended on my own. I've been at the Panther Corporation for eleven months as a marketing assistant, which is the bottom level in our department. I started

off just doing menial tasks like typing letters, getting the sandwiches, and collecting my boss Paul's dry cleaning. But after a couple of months, I was allowed to start checking copy. Then a few months ago, I got to write my very own promotional leaflet, for a tie-in with washing powder! God, I was excited. I bought a creative-writing book especially to help me, and I spent all weekend working on it. And I was really pleased with the result, even if it didn't have a misunderstood villain like the book suggested. And even if Paul did just glance at the copy and say "Fine" and kind of forget to tell anyone that I wrote it.

Since then I've done a fair bit of writing promotional literature, and I've even sat in on a few meetings with Paul. So I really think I'm moving up the ladder. In lots of ways I'm practically a marketing executive already!

Except for the tiny point that I still seem to do just as much typing as before. And getting sandwiches and collecting dry cleaning. I just do it *as well as* the other jobs. Especially so since our departmental secretary, Gloria, left a few weeks ago and still hasn't been replaced.

But it's all going to change; I know it is. This meeting is my big break. It's my first chance to show Paul what I'm really capable of. I had to beg him to let me go—after all, Glen Oil and Panther have done loads of deals together in the past; it's not like there'll be any surprises. But deep down I know I'm here only because I was in his office when he realized he'd double-booked with an awards lunch that most of the department were attending. So here I am, representing the company.

And my secret hope is that if I do well today, I'll get promoted. The job ad said "possibility of promotion after a year"—and it's nearly been a year. And on Monday I'm having my appraisal meeting. I looked up "Appraisals" in the staff induction book, and it said they

are “an ideal opportunity to discuss possibilities for career advancement.”

Career advancement! At the thought, I feel a familiar stab of longing. It would just show Dad I’m not a complete loser. And Mum. And Kerry. If I could just go home and say, “By the way, I’ve been promoted to marketing executive.”

Emma Corrigan, marketing executive.

Emma Corrigan, senior vice-president (marketing).

As long as everything goes well today. Paul said the deal was pretty much done and dusted, and all I had to do was raise one point about timing, and even I should be able to manage that. And so far, I reckon it’s going really well!

OK, so I don’t understand some of the terms they’re using. But then I didn’t understand most of my GCSE French Oral either, and I still got a B.

“Rebranding . . . analysis . . . cost-effective . . .”

The man in the gray suit is still droning on. As casually as possible, I extend my hand and inch his business card toward me so I can read it.

Doug Hamilton. That’s right. I can remember this. Doug. Dug. Easy—I’ll picture a shovel. Together with a *ham*. Which . . . which looks *ill* . . . and . . .

OK, forget this. I’ll just write it down.

I write down “rebranding” and “Doug Hamilton” on my notepad and give an uncomfortable little wriggle. God, my knickers really are uncomfortable. I mean, G-strings are never that comfortable at the best of times, but these are particularly bad. Which could be because they’re two sizes too small.

Which could possibly be because when Connor bought them for me, he told the lingerie assistant I weighed 118 pounds. Whereupon she told him I must be size 4. Size 4!

So it got to Christmas Eve, and we were exchanging presents, and I unwrapped this pair of gorgeous pale pink silk knickers. Size 4. And I basically had two options.

A: Confess the truth: "Actually, these are too small. I'm more of an eight, and by the way, I don't really weigh one hundred eighteen pounds."

B: Shoehorn myself into them.

Actually, it was fine. You could hardly see the red lines on my skin afterward. And all it meant was that I had to quickly cut the labels out of my clothes so Connor would never realize.

Since then, I've hardly ever worn this particular set of underwear, needless to say. But every so often I see them, looking all nice and expensive in the drawer, and think, Oh, come on, they can't be *that* tight, and somehow squeeze into them. Which is what I did this morning. I even decided I must have lost weight, because they didn't feel too bad.

I am such a deluded moron.

"... unfortunately, since rebranding ... major rethink ... feel we need to be considering alternative synergies ..."

Up to now I've just been sitting and nodding, thinking this business meeting is really easy. But now Doug Hamilton's voice starts to impinge on my consciousness. What's he saying?

"... two products diverging ... becoming incompatible ..."

What was that about incompatible? What was that about a major rethink? I feel a jolt of alarm.

"We appreciate the functional and synergetic partnership that Panther and Glen Oil have enjoyed in the past," Doug Hamilton is saying, "but you'll agree that clearly we're going in different directions."

Different directions?

My stomach gives an anxious lurch.

He can't be—

Is he trying to pull out of the deal?

"Excuse me, Doug," I say in my most relaxed voice. "Obviously I was closely following what you were saying earlier." I give a friendly, we're-all-professionals-together smile. "But if you could just . . . um, recap the situation for all our benefits . . ."

In plain English, I beg silently.

Doug Hamilton and the other guy exchange glances.

"We're a little unhappy about your brand values," says Doug Hamilton.

"My brand values?" I echo in panic.

"The brand values of the *product*," he says, giving me an odd look. "As I've been explaining, we here at Glen Oil are going through a rebranding process at the moment, and we see our new image very much as a *caring* petrol, as our new daffodil logo demonstrates. And we feel Panther Prime, with its emphasis on sport and competition, is simply too aggressive."

"Aggressive?" I stare at him in bewilderment. "But . . . it's a fruit drink."

This makes no sense. Glen Oil is fume-making, world-ruining petrol. Panther Prime is an innocent cranberry-flavored drink. How can it be too aggressive?

"The values it espouses." He gestures to the marketing brochures on the table. "Drive. Elitism. Masculinity. The very slogan 'Don't Pause.' Frankly, it seems a little dated." He shrugs. "We just don't think a joint initiative will be possible."

No. No. This can't be happening. He can't be pulling out.

Everyone at the office will think it was my fault. They'll think I cocked it up and I'm completely crap.

My heart is thumping. My face is hot. I can't let this happen. But what do I say? I haven't prepared anything. Paul said the promotion was all set up, and all I had to do was tell them we wanted to bring it forward to June.

"We'll certainly discuss it again before we make a decision," Doug's saying. He gives me a brief smile. "And as I say, we would like to continue links with the Panther Corporation, so this has been a useful meeting, in any case. . . ."

He's pushing back his chair.

I can't let this slip away! I have to try to win them around.

"Wait!" I hear myself say. "Just . . . wait a moment! I have a few points to make."

There's a can of Panther Prime sitting on the desk, and I grab it for inspiration. Playing for time, I stand up, walk to the center of the room, and raise the can high into the air where we can all see it. "Panther Prime is . . . a sports drink."

I stop, and there's a polite silence. My face is prickling. "It, um, it is very . . ."

Oh, God. What am I doing?

Come on, Emma. *Think*. Think Panther Prime. . . . Think Panther Cola. . . . Think. . . . Think. . . .

Yes! Of course!

"Since the launch of Panther Cola in the late 1980s, Panther drinks have been a byword for energy, excitement, and excellence," I say fluently.

Thank God. This is the standard marketing blurb for Panther Cola. I've typed it out so many times, I could recite it in my sleep.

"Panther drinks are a marketing phenomenon," I continue. "The Panther character is one of the most widely recognized in the world, while the classic slogan 'Don't Pause' has made it into dictionaries. We are offering Glen Oil an exclusive opportunity to strengthen its association with this premium, world-famous brand."

My confidence growing, I start to stride around the room, gesturing with the can. "By buying a Panther health drink, the consumer is signaling that he will settle for nothing but the best." I hit the can sharply with my other hand. "He expects the best from his energy drink, he expects the best from his petrol, he expects the best from himself."

I'm flying! I'm fantastic! If Paul could see me now, he'd give me a promotion on the spot!

I come over to the desk and look Doug Hamilton right in the eye. "When the Panther consumer opens that can, he is making a choice that tells the world who he is. I'm asking Glen Oil to make the same choice."

As I finish speaking, I plant the can firmly in the middle of the desk, reach for the ring pull, and, with a cool smile, snap it back.

And a volcano erupts.

Fizzy cranberry-flavored drink explodes in a whoosh out of the can, drenching the papers and blotters in lurid red liquid . . . and—oh, no, please no—spattering all over Doug Hamilton's shirt.

"Fuck!" I gasp. "I mean, I'm really sorry—"

"Jesus Christ," says Doug Hamilton irritably, standing up and getting a handkerchief out of his pocket. "Does this stuff stain?"

"Er . . ." I grab the can helplessly. "I don't know."

"I'll get a cloth," says the other guy, and leaps to his feet.

The door closes behind him and there's silence, apart