

An Excerpt from Shattered Lies...

Chapter 1

Kate awoke with a start. It was a feeling she couldn't shake and had no idea why. She didn't know it yet, but a tide was turning close to home and, with it, a treacherous page in the book of her life. It was a revelation that she could never see coming. It was an insidious act that no one could ever expect and it would forever change her life as she knew it. The beginning of a rip current was in motion and nothing could divert it or stop it now. Kate didn't know it yet, but she was caught up in the middle of it all without a life jacket of any kind. Would she swim, or would she sink deep into the bowels of it? Only time would tell.

Uncle Lincoln's words of yesterday were still fresh in her mind. Was he accurate in his supposition, or was he merely being paranoid? It didn't matter. Today she was going to do something she'd been meaning to do for ages but never had the time or inclination to do.

With hands on her hips, she tried to decide where to start first. From the size of it all, she decided the best thing was just to plunge in and see where it took her. Light filled the attic from incandescent bulbs hanging from the bare ceiling fixtures. There were a few burnt-out light bulbs near two of the four dormer windows. She scurried around the maze of boxes, furniture, and trunks when, out of the corner of her eye, she saw something move. It moved again. She jumped

back and then, looking closer, realized it was just a mouse. She sighed and shook her head at her reaction. Four years of veterinary school and she'd reacted so silly. It was obviously more afraid of her than she was of it.

“Go on,” she said to it. “I won't hurt you. Just don't do anything and don't let Gran see you.”

After shuffling through piles of aged boxes of various sizes for a few hours, Kate found one small box under larger ones. The box was completely worn out and smashed in from the weight of the others. All were covered in dust. Curious, she reached into the small box and pulled out the smashed-in pieces of cardboard. Inside the box were loose paper clippings of nothing significant. The clippings were yellow, worn, and fragile to her touch. She took them out, flipped through them, and found articles about Mississippi and Yazoo County. She placed the pile of clippings to the side. Underneath the pile, there was a little book. It was pale blue in color about the size of a small paperback. The cover was made of cloth and there were tears in the fabric on the corners. The cover was blank with nothing written along the spine.

“Miss Kate.” It was Elsa's light voice mixed in with the creaking of the stairs. “Are you up here?”

“Yes, it is I, Elsa, and I'm fine,” Kate said, anxious to go through the book she found. Her back was a little bit sore and she could feel the beginning of a headache coming on.

Elsa coughed and let out a sneeze as she came to the top of the stairs and glanced around. Her bright blue eyes were as wide as silver dollars. “Do you need anything?”

“No. I'm fine. Go on now.”

Elsa gave it one quick go over and moved to go back downstairs.

“You sure? It’s a bit spooky up here.” The older woman had been employed with them for two years and Kate appreciated her levelheadedness and efficiency, and her quirky sense of humor. “Don’t you need some company or anything?” She wasn’t from the South and found everything fascinating.

Kate laughed. “No. Go on now.”

She just wanted to be alone. She heard the creaking of the stairs as Elsa disappeared out of sight. Kate should have come up here sooner. She had a sense that there was a great deal of history up here, but there were always other things that preoccupied her time. Things happened on a working horse farm. There was always something to do. There were fences to mend, crops to plant and harvest, trees to plant or trim, brush to burn, chores to do, and animals to vaccinate and tend to. She always took charge personally. Life was never boring at Magnolia Lane Farm. It was anything but that.

Elsa hurried down the stairs and right into her husband. “Whoa! Who put this good looking wall here?”

Sam was a handsome man with caramel skin and eyes to match, though at this moment his eyes weren't so warm and gooey. "What are you doing up there?" he demanded.

"K—Miss Kate went up there. I went to check on her—"

"What do you mean? You let her up there? Why?" he asked.

"I didn't let her up there," Elsa said. "And why not? It's her house, too."

"I told you no one is allowed up there. No one."

"Relax, Sam. I'm sure Miss Katherine didn't mean Kate," Elsa said.

"Damn it, woman! I told you when we first came here that Miss Katherine has rules—"

"Don't you shout at me, Mr. Johnson, or curse at me! I'm not one of your soldiers!" She'd take that kind of attitude from no one and set her hands on her hips.

Sam sighed. "I'm sorry, honey, it's just...you shouldn't have let her up there. Is she still up there?" He glanced up the stairs.

"Yes...you mind telling me what the big deal is, anyway?" she asked.

"Later, help me get her down from there." His eyes pleaded.

"Please."

"I beg your pardon. She's not doing anything up there. This is her house, too. You're not going to stand there and tell me she isn't supposed to be up there? Why?"

“Damn it, woman, you can be positively frustrating sometimes.”

“Well, you’re not exactly my prince charming everyday yourself, but I still love you, anyway.”

He sighed. Sometimes there was no arguing with his wife. “I love you, but please help me get her down, now.” He headed for the stairs.

Up he went and entered the attic.

“Miss Kate? Are you up here?” He didn’t see her—just a whole lot of junk was spread out before him. “Miss Kate, where are you?”

“I’m here.” Her voice answered from behind. She stood up surrounded by old, wrinkled cardboard boxes stacked waist high.

“Miss Kate, you shouldn’t be up here,” he said. He hadn’t been up here in years not since...it wasn’t important anymore. That was a long time ago.

“I’m fine. Don’t worry about me,” Kate said. She didn’t face them. She was focused on the boxes that surrounded her.

He didn’t like this at all. “It’s not too safe up here. You don’t know what you may find.”

“Like a mouse?” Elsa said from behind him, using his broad shouldered body as a shield. Her eyes scanned the attic. “Looks like a place they’d hide in. He’s worried you’ll get hurt or get asthma.”

“She’s right, Miss Kate. It’s pretty dusty and dirty up here. You should come down now.”

“One just doesn’t get asthma,” Kate replied. “When I’m done. You two go on now.”

“Really, Miss Kate,” Elsa said. “Let us clean it up a bit and you can come up another day.”

“It’s fine the way it is. I’ll be fine. Go on,” she told them.

Sam appreciated his wife’s input. Elsa always backed him up, even when he didn’t tell her everything at the outset. She was his partner through and through. If only he could be honest with her. Maybe he would soon enough. “Miss Kate, we can’t leave you up here on your own. What if you get hurt or something? Your grandmother wouldn’t be happy.”

“Sam, Elsa, I appreciate your concern, but I’ve survived life for thirty years on this farm, and in this house. I think I can handle a few hours up here in this attic. Now go on. I insist.”

Sam went to open his mouth but shut it. Kate could be just as stubborn as her grandmother. “All right, Miss Kate. I give up. Just don’t be too long and be careful. Please.”

“I will,” she said, moving one cardboard box off another.

When he saw that, he moved to intervene. “Maybe we should stay up here and help you. Those boxes might be heavy.”

“Go on. If I need a hand, I’ll send for you. Stop being a worrywart, Sam. Both of you scat. I’m too old for a babysitter.”

Sam hesitated. He had to get her out of the attic. If Miss Katherine found out, there'd be hell to pay, but he couldn't physically make Kate leave. That left him without any other options.

"Let's go, Sam. She doesn't want our help," Elsa said.

He knew how much Elsa liked Kate, and he also knew she wasn't about to bother her anymore without an explanation from him, and that he couldn't do. He hesitated. Elsa almost had to drag him down the stairs. Down on the landing, they stopped. "Why did you let her go up there?" Sam asked.

"I didn't allow her to do anything," Elsa said. "You still haven't told me what the big deal is."

"It doesn't matter now." He moved to leave but she caught his wrist.

"It matters to you and if it matters to you, my teddy bear, it matters to me."

"Later. I'll tell you later. I have to go shoe some horses." He kissed her cheek and went down the stairs to the second floor.

Alone again, Kate finally gave the attic a closer look. The place was a mess. This was so unlike her fastidious grandmother. Boxes were strewn everywhere. Trunks lay against one wall and were visibly worn with tattered edges and rusted locks. Old pieces of furniture and antiques were everywhere. Mirrors, large and small leaned against another wall. Some items were covered with

grayish sheets while others were open for view. Dust covered everything. The attic was huge! They could hold a dance up here, if need warranted it. Now she knew why no one came up here and why her grandmother kept it locked. It looked as if someone was just trying to discard portions of their life. Or someone had a yard sale when a tornado hit. There was no organization to it at all.

Kate cleared a spot on the large box and eased down, slowly at first, to test its sturdiness. When it held her weight without issue, she sat, placed the small book on her lap, and opened it. The pages were yellow and unevenly cut along the edges. Inside, the handwritten words of a long time ago came to life, revealing some things she didn't know, and raised a great deal of questions she never knew she had, until now. There was hardly anything in it, but what she did read raised feelings she had never expected.

Visiting with Uncle Linc yesterday made her think about how little she knew about her parents and just how little her grandmother discussed them. Her grandmother always spoke of her son, Jax, Kate's father with great regard. That is, when she spoke of him. Her grandmother never mentioned Kate's mother, Olivia, never. Not once. Not even to say she didn't like her daughter-in-law. Kate guessed the two women didn't get along, but she wanted to know more. Maybe, just maybe, there was something in the attic. There certainly looked as if this was the place that could hold the secrets of a city, if need be. Secrets? Why had she thought of that? She had no secrets and neither did her grandmother. Her grandmother was an open book. What you saw was what you got. She bent to no one. Kate admired her. She was one tough independent lady, way ahead of her time.

Kate never gave it any thought before why her grandmother kept the keys in her bedroom instead of downstairs in the kitchen with the other farm keys. Kate had retrieved the key ring from her grandmother's dresser draw. Her grandmother had a certain way of doing things and sometimes there was no rhyme or reason to it. It was the way Katherine Thayer wanted it, plain and simple.

After reading, Kate closed the small book, rested her hand on it, and shut her eyes. After a moment, she placed her other hand on the book, picked it up, brought it up to her chest, and held it there, as if to absorb the feelings inside. She had to know what it all meant and went to the one person she knew would know more than anyone, to the one person she could trust. Without a beat, she stood up and rushed down the stairs and to her grandmother's room. With a cursory glance out the hall window on her way downstairs, she noticed that the yellow pickup was back. Grandmother and Carol obviously returned from their trip to do the weekly shopping. Outside the door, Kate stopped, not exactly sure how to approach this delicate situation before her. She had never questioned her grandmother's actions before, but then she never had any reason to, did she? Now, she wondered, about a great many things.

After a long moment she lost track of, she knocked. She heard her grandmother's voice tell her to come in. After taking a deep slow breath, Kate grasped the brass knob and entered.

There she was, her usually larger than life self, but not as large as Kate thought of her just hours before. Katherine was seated at her antique roll-top desk with Carol seated next to her. The sun filled the room, but right now things didn't seem as bright to Kate as they usually were inside here.

“Grandmother, I’d like to speak with you,” she began as she took a step forward.

“Of course, darling. Sit down,” Katherine said. “You may go, Carol. Thank you.”

Carol stood up and headed for the door, giving Kate a smile on the way out. Her mouth revealed a set of perfect white teeth. Neatly cropped black hair framed her pecan-colored skin. She had wide brown eyes that were full of life.

Kate gave a perfunctory smile in return. Carol pointed to the front of Kate’s shirt and waved at it, then went to the oak door and closed it behind her.

Kate looked down and brushed the light blue oxford shirt off, not realizing she had some dust on her, probably all over her. Great. So be it. Now was no time to clean up and no time to worry about it.

“I was just going over the replies for the party,” Katherine boasted, not looking up from her task. “We even received some checks for donations in advance. I think we will do extremely well this year.”

“I’m glad.” However, that was the farthest thing from her mind right now. “Grandmother, I need to ask you something,” Kate said, taking another foot forward, one at a time, until she was near her. “Why don’t you just let Tessa do that? Isn’t that why you have a secretary to begin with, to help you with all your charity work?” Kate sat down in the Queen Anne chair that Carol had vacated next to the matching desk.

“Because, my darling Kate, when it comes to the handling of money, there are only two persons I trust. That is you and I, and no one else. We agreed. You run the farm. I handle any

finances.” Katherine extended her hand to rest on Kate’s. “You’re the only one I trust implicitly.”

“Thanks, Gran. I trust you too,” Kate said. She appreciated that her grandmother truly trusted no one else.

“Darling.” Katherine released her. Her right eyebrow rose momentarily. “Whatever have you been doing? You’re covered in dust?” Her grandmother brushed her hands together to the side of the desk, discarding any dust into the wastebasket below.

“Cleaning up. Nothing special,” Kate said. “I need to speak with you.”

Katherine returned to flip through the stack of RSVP cards and checks on her desk. Her elderly fingers were quite nimble in their task. “Now go ahead, darling. I’m listening.”

“It’s important.”

Katherine set down the paperwork and turned to face her. Her hand immediately went to Kate’s forehead. “Darling, are you ill? You don’t feel warm.”

Kate caught her hand as her grandmother lowered it. “No, I’m not ill. Please stop fussing.” At least not with a cold. “Do you know anything about this?” Kate placed the worn blue journal onto the desk before them, in front of her grandmother.

Her grandmother’s perfectly trimmed eyebrows arched. “One of your recent acquisitions from the library, no doubt.”

“No, Grandmother. It isn’t.”

Katherine turned away. "Then I really don't know, darling."

"Grandmother, why aren't there any photos of my mother in the house?" Kate asked, curiosity nipping at the bud.

"I told you, she was camera shy," Katherine said.

"This is my mother's journal," Kate said and looked for a reaction.

"Is it? I had no idea."

Katherine didn't look at her, which puzzled Kate immediately.

Whenever they spoke, her grandmother always gave her utmost attention.

"Where ever did you find it?" Katherine asked.

"In the attic," Kate said.

Katherine's eyes widened then she furrowed her eyebrows. Kate noticed her grandmother's lower lip quiver or was it just her imagination?

"The attic?" Katherine asked. "What were you doing up there, darling?"

"I just felt like it. What difference does it make?"

"I don't want anyone in the attic." Katherine was abrupt. "It's dangerous. You could have been hurt."

Kate ignored her concern. She wanted answers. “Yes, she wrote this apparently just after she married my father.”

“Did she now? Well, I wouldn’t worry about it. There’s nothing worth reading in there. You can burn it,” Katherine said.

“It belonged to my mother. Why would I want to burn it?”

Katherine faced her. Her gaze was steady and unmoving. “Your mother had very little to say when alive. I doubt there is anything of value in there.”

Kate shot to her feet. “How dare you, Gran?” Katherine had never mentioned Kate’s mother, ever, and to hear such coldness in the words about her astonished her. “She did say that you hated her. Why did you hate her?”

Katherine raised her hand. “Now calm down, darling. That is an exaggeration.”

“No, it isn’t. She said you hated her. You couldn’t stand her. That you actually tried to split her and my father up—more than once, as did her parents.”

Without warning, Katherine seized the journal and threw it into the nearby trashcan. “There is nothing in there for you to worry about. And that is where it belongs.”

Kate reached for it unsuccessfully. “Grandmother—”

“I had nothing against your mother—personally. I just think she wasn’t suited for my son, your father. Now leave it be.” Katherine turned away and focused back on the papers. “I’d like to get these checks in order before the party tonight.”

Kate remained for a moment but knew that once her grandmother ended a conversation it would remain that way. She sighed, walked over to the small brass trashcan, and bent down to retrieve the journal.

“Leave it,” her grandmother ordered.

It was the first time Kate ever heard that tone in her voice. “It’s my mother’s.” She took it out. “I’d like to keep it.”

“I’d rather you didn’t,” Katherine said.

“Why?” Kate asked and met her unwavering gaze.

“There’s nothing important in it. Nothing of value. Why keep such a thing?”

“I want to,” Kate said. She noticed the veins in her grandmother’s neck twinge and the edges of her mouth stiffen. “It’s mine. I want it,” Kate said.

“Fine, darling, if it’ll make you happy. I see no reason for sentimentality.” Katherine turned back to the work at hand. Kate studied her. Her grandmother said nothing, which was puzzling. No lecture, nothing.

A very anxious knocking on the door interrupted them and it opened. Carol rushed in and was clearly out of breath, “Good afternoon—Miss Kate—Miss Katherine. Forgive me.”

“Goodness, Carol,” Katherine said. “Calm down, girl. What is it?”

“Out—at the barn. It’s Mr. Carl. He—says that Delta is—about ready to foal. He’s been calling you and calling you for the last ten minutes. He said it can happen anytime soon.”

Katherine stood up. “Tell Carl we’ll be right there.”

Kate forgot she had shut off her cell phone while with Uncle Linc yesterday and never turned it back on.

“Will do, Miss Katherine. I laid out that nice blue dress you wanted for tonight, Miss Kate,” Carol said as she moved toward the door.

“It is sure to be a fine shindig.”

“Yes, it will. Thank you, Carol,” Kate said.

Kate headed downstairs and out the door with her grandmother leading the way. All Kate could hear on the way down was the sound of their shoes on the wooden floor and steps.

Seventy years old and her grandmother never slowed down. When she had a job to do, the older woman just did it—no complaints, nothing. The short walk would do Kate good, even if she did rush it. Besides, it looked as if the three pick-ups were in use at the time.

They arrived at the brick barn in five minutes. Carl was on his knees with Delta Darling, one of their prized Andalusian mares. Delta Darling was ten years old. Kate had raised the female from a foal. She was as beautiful as freshly fallen snow. The mare was already on her side. She was breathing rapidly but appeared fine otherwise.

“Where have you been, Miss Kate? She’s about ready,” Carl said.

“I was worried about you. Why didn’t you answer your phone?” He stopped when he saw Katherine alongside her.

“Sorry, Carl. I had it off.” Not that she owed him an explanation but he deserved one. After all, he’d been with her family forever.

Kate took a canvas smock from the shelf inside the door, unfolded it, and put it on. She also took a pair of thick black rubber gloves off the shelf and put them on. She went to her knees and patted the mare on the neck. “Easy, girl.” She began to speak soothingly “We’re here. You’re not alone. We’ll get you through this just like before. Easy, girl.”

The horse neighed at her, as if acknowledging her presence.

Katherine echoed Kate’s words as she entered the stall, went down to her knees, and took the mare’s head on her lap. “Easy girl. No need to worry. Easy. We’re here like always.”

Her glamorous grandmother was quite out of her element, dressed simply in faded blue jeans, an untucked long-sleeved shirt, and her long hair flowing around her shoulders, but it didn’t faze her. Nothing fazed the older woman. Her naturally attractive grandmother could fit in anywhere without any effort at all.

Kate should have eaten something more substantial this morning. After a hurried shower in her private bath, she merely rushed downstairs for a quick breakfast snack—a glass of orange juice and a yogurt. The orange juice went down quickly, but when she tried to eat the yogurt, she couldn't. She just wasn't very hungry. Come to think of it, she hadn't been very hungry in a long time and especially since yesterday. She did manage to swallow a couple of finger sandwiches at lunch yesterday, but that was it. She'd have to try and eat more tonight.

Delta handled things gracefully. The birth was uneventful. The mare grunted during the process trying to expel her young as soon as possible. It took a little over fifteen minutes for the entire process to occur. The mare gave birth to a solid black foal, black as the stud, Standing Tall, its father. Already an experienced mother, Delta started licking her newborn, cleaning it of the afterbirth.

While Katherine examined the foal for any abnormalities, Kate noticed something more. It was exactly six minutes later when it happened.

“My God, Gran, its twins. She's having twins.” There was another foal on the way out, this time a smaller white foal. Kate grinned as the small head and feet exited first, very slowly. Kate pulled the translucent placenta and afterbirth away from the foal as it made its way all the way out and onto the ground next to its mother and Kate. Delta lifted her head, got up on her side, and gave her attention to her new babies.

Kate took a stethoscope out of her black bag that was on the shelf. She listened to the mare's heartbeat. “Good girl. You're doing fine. Good girl. No worries.” She checked on the each foal.

She removed the stethoscope from her ears and nuzzled each one and their mother behind their ears.

Carl stood up. "I'll be damned," he said. "Twins. Now isn't that something? Are they all right? How's our girl?" Carl was a lanky White man. The only White man they employed. He had been with the plantation thirty years and knew everything there was to know about horses. Rumors had it that if he didn't know it, then that fact didn't exist yet. He had started work at Magnolia Lane Farm right after college just like his father before him had done. Kate appreciated his wisdom and experience.

"They're fine, Carl," she said. "All three girls are fine." She released a breath in relief. No matter how many times she witnessed their animals giving birth, the whole thing still amazed her.

She heard Carl release his breath. "I knew it'd be twins. I just knew it. I wanted to check, but your grandmother said no. Every time we check first, we lose one, or both, or all of them. When we don't, they all make it. Rare, huh, Miss Kate. Very rare."

"Odds are about 1 in 500,000 for them both to be born alive," Kate said. "Now we have to keep them that way."

"They'll be fine, Miss Kate. We'll see to it, you and me. It's nice to have you around, especially at times like these." He leaned against the stall fence. "Now we just let mama do her job and help her along."

“They’re beautiful, Gran. Look,” Kate said, leaning back to admire them. She turned around, but her grandmother was gone. “Where did my grandmother go?”

“Don’t know. Didn’t see her. I was watching the foals. Good looking animals they are too.” Carl said. “Maybe she went to get ready for that fancy party of hers. You better get freshened up too. You know better that Miss Katherine expects things on time.”

“I should. Hate to leave these girls though,” she said.

He leaned his long arms along the top of the stall fence. “You know, Miss Kate, you can tell me to mind my own business but— well I have to ask?”

“Go ahead, Carl. Ask away.” She knew he would anyway.

“You don’t seem much for these fancy dress parties any more than I am. Why do you go?” he asked.

“Why do you think I do?”

“Honestly? For your grandmother, Miss Katherine. I figure she’d do the same for you. You’re both alike in that way. You’re a lot like your grandmother, you know.”

She appreciated the compliment, but...

“Me? No way, Carl. I’m nothing like her. She can do anything.

She’d ride a rogue bull if she had to. She’d break a horse if necessary.”

“So would you. You’ve proved that,” he told her.

“You’re being too kind and you’re making me blush, so I am getting out of here.” She nuzzled the two babies and patted the mare on the head. “I’ll be back, girls.” She got to her feet. “Take care of them for me, Carl. Call me if anything changes. Good night.”

“No problem, Miss Kate. Good night.”

She looked back at the small family of three. Now we have something to celebrate aside from the regular occasion. She couldn’t help but admire the new foals. They were an awesome sight. No matter how many times she had witnessed the miracle of birth among their horses and cattle, she never tired of it.

Back inside her bedroom suite, a fury was building up within Katherine. She didn’t want to lose her temper in front of Kate. Now that she was alone, she could let loose. She threw the stack of papers and checks she had so meticulously put in order across the room. She snapped out of her chair so quickly that her chair slammed back onto the wooden floor.

Carol opened the door just as the chair slammed.

“Find, Sam! Get him here now!” Katherine ordered.

Carol knew better than to ask twice, even though today was his “official” day off. “Yes, ma’am,” was all she said and scurried out the door, closing it gently behind. Sam never really had a day off, when there was something he had to do.

“I’ll kill him,” Katherine growled. “I swear I will. Damn him! Damn them all!”

End of Chapter One.