

Copyright © 2020 by Susan A. Jennings

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise without written permission from the publisher. It is illegal to copy this excerpt or book, post it to a website, or distribute it by any other means without permission.

To purchase book click here or the link below <https://books2read.com/u/mBgVxD>

A Lavender Cottage Book - *Believing Her Lies*

Lavender Cottage, Springsville, England

Chapter One

Full House

Katie fidgeted with the sapphires on her finger, smiling. In fact she had not stopped smiling since Christmas morning when Piers Bannister put the ring on her finger. Now it was Easter and while she had suggested an Easter wedding, Piers had refused because he and Julianne had married in the spring. He didn't want to tempt fate; losing one wife was bad enough. Katie wanted to believe him, but did she? Trust was an issue; not between them, but because each had their own troubled past—Piers a widower, struggling to overcome grief, and Katie, a divorcee, learning to come to terms with the betrayal. On the surface it appeared they had overcome their doubts, but had they?

“Am I being naive?” Katie said, directing her question to her white Bichon Frisé curled up by the fire. Buddy Boy opened one eye as if to acknowledge her question and went back to sleep. Her hands hugged the coffee mug, while her feet were tucked under her in her favourite blue chair. She stared into the flames of the morning fire. Something niggled at the back of her mind.

“Penny for them?” Adam said, poking the fire and groaning as his hand supported his back.

“Just enjoying the warm fire. I can't believe it's April and there's still a chill in the air.” Her face creased with concern. “Is your back sore again today?”

“Damp weather gets to my arthritis. That's why I lit the fire. I need to get back to gardening to loosen up. Maybe I'll work on the rose garden today. So, what's bothering you?”

“You know me too well. How long is it now, two years? I remember an old man coming to my door, leaning on a walking stick, and now you are my resident handyman-come-gardener. Of course it might have something to do with the fact that this used to be your cottage and your ghostly wife still lives in the verandah.” Katie grinned, adding, “Not to mention that you are a dear friend.”

“It’s a long time since I’ve used that cane. And …” Adam paused, raising an eyebrow. “Changing the subject, missy, won’t work. Are you going to tell me what’s bothering you?”

“Really, it’s nothing. I’m just thinking about the busy weekend ahead. First time since the renovations that we’ve had a full house and, the most guests we’ve ever had, nine counting Judy. She and the dogs will have to share with me. It’s probably better to have the Golden Retrievers on the main level since Sam and Lily can be rambunctious. Not as laid back as you Buddy Boy.” Katie tousled Buddy’s fluffy white head. At the sound of his name, Buddy jumped up, tail wagging. “I know what you want, a w.a.l.k. I’ll get dressed.”

Katie wandered into her new quarters off the kitchen. It contained a private suite, with a large living room, bedroom and bathroom, next to her new office. Above were two guest bedrooms with modern ensuite bathrooms, which meant only the two single rooms had a shared bathroom. People were fussy these days. Adam’s room was upstairs, as she liked to have someone on the guest level to keep an eye on things.

* * *

Buddy Boy ran towards the canal with Katie not far behind. A heavy damp mist hung over the canal basin. *Tranquil Days*, Piers’ narrowboat, seemed silent and haunting, suspended in the swirling mist. Katie relished the morning silence broken only by birds and a splash from a mallard diving for breakfast. Bob, the marina owner and manager moved quietly in the distance, inspecting the moorings. A light shone from Mary’s Cafe where Mary, Bob’s wife, had been up for hours baking. The smell of muffins and fresh coffee settled in the mist.

Buddy Boy ran ahead to the towpath, sniffing at every blade of grass as though it had popped up new and fresh overnight. This was Katie’s time of the day. The quiet helped her think and many decisions had been made on this towpath. They included the move from suburbia to Springsville and opening Lavender Cottage as a B&B when John, her ex, stopped paying alimony. She had loved entertaining guests when she and John were a couple but had never imagined that it would translate into a successful B&B. Now, with the extension and a booked season she was set for life. So what was it that niggled at her? It could only be Piers. In her heart she knew they loved each other and yet, even with the engagement ring, there was an uncertainty she could not explain.

Barking jolted her from her thoughts. Buddy had reached the stile into the field and the barking multiplied as two golden heads appeared over the steps of the stile and greeted him.

A voice the other side of the hedge called, “Sam, Lily, don’t you dare go near the water.” Seconds later a head popped up from the hedge. “Good morning, Katie!”

“Judy! What are you doing here so early?”

Katie climbed over the stile where Buddy was already chasing Sam to the other end of the field, his little legs not quite long enough to catch up. Sedate Lily was holding back at Buddy's side.

"Jet lag. I got back from Canada yesterday afternoon, eight hour time difference from British Columbia and my internal clock is not sure whether it's day or night." Judy pointed to Sam. "Sam needed to run off some energy so I packed a weekend bag and here we are. Still in curlers so to speak." Judy ran her fingers through her short straight hair.

Katie laughed. "A female engineer, busting her buns to keep up with her male counterparts, I can see. You, in curlers, I cannot imagine."

"It's good to see you, Katie. Having just spent a week at an engineering conference with said males, I am ready for female company." Judy paused, "and coffee."

The women linked arms and followed the dogs to Mary's Cafe. The dogs ran to the Dog Mooring sign and lapped thirstily from the big steel water bowls as Katie secured them to the convenient leash hooks.

Placing two steaming mugs on the counter Mary added a plate of hot buttered scones. "Good morning, Katie, Judy!"

"Wow, this is service. My favourite breakfast," Katie said.

"I saw you tying the dogs up. How are the bookings for Easter?"

"Fully booked. I'll need to increase my order of hot cross buns to two dozen."

"Bob says it'll be a big turnout this weekend. He's been working all week getting the boats ready. Saturday's BBQ is sold out. Piers has offered to help Bob with the cooking."

"He has?" Katie couldn't keep the surprise out of her voice. Cooking was not one of Piers' strong points. "He's on duty at the clinic until 4 p.m. Will he be here in time?"

"I don't know the details. He talked to Bob. Since you two got engaged, Piers has come out of his shell. Bob said he wants to get involved with the community." Mary gave a chuckle. "Getting ready to move in with you no doubt. Have you set the date yet?"

"No-o-o," Katie answered with her thoughts on Mary's first comment *'Getting ready to move in with you.'* *We've never discussed where we would live. His medical practice is in Nottingham. Will he expect me to move from Springsville?*

"Katie. Earth to Katie!" Judy stared at her. "What is going on in that head of yours?"

Sitting at their favourite table, Katie gazed across at the mist lifting from the canal. "Piers hasn't committed to a wedding date. Judy, am I doing the right thing?"

"Do you love him? Does he love you?"

Katie nodded yes.

“Then what’s the problem? Is this your intuition again or just wedding nerves?”

“I’d never thought of me having wedding nerves.”

“Dearest Katie, I have known you for thirty something years and with the exception of the births of Melanie and Ben, I’ve never seen you so happy. Stop worrying and set the wedding date.”

“My no nonsense friend, always to the point. You are right. I will talk to Piers this weekend,” Katie said, slipping into her thoughts. *And we need to discuss where we are going to live. How come I had never thought of that? I’m not moving, even for Piers.*

* * *

Sir Walter Rutherford stood at the side of his car as the chauffeur unloaded his suitcase. Seeing Katie and Judy walking from the marina, he waved and walked towards them.

“Sir Walter, how lovely to see you. You are looking well,” Katie said, remembering the last visit and the panic attack scare.

“I am feeling well, thanks to Dr. Bannister. No more panic attacks, I promise. Judy, nice to see you too. It looks as though it’s the old gang.”

“Pretty much. Rick, Cindy and the kids arrive tomorrow. Some new B&B guests are arriving tonight. One couple asked if we served Easter dinner so I invited them. They, or she, sounded a bit weird. Carly Byron. She avoided giving me her companion’s name but she did ask for a double room with two beds.”

“Never a dull moment at Lavender Cottage,” Sir Walter added, laughing. “Speaking of weird, how are Cyril and Olivia?”

“Olivia has filed for divorce and it looks like a romance is blossoming with Cyril. I don’t see them much but they are coming for dinner on Sunday,” Katie said, leading the way into the cottage.

“Walter, how are you? Come in, come in!” Adam said, holding the door wide open. “You have the Morning Glory Room.”

“I’m well, Adam. Ah, the East room. I can watch the sun come up. How are the roses? This cold spring will hold them back” Sir Walter and Adam’s conversation became murmured as they reached the top of the stairs.

“Those two really enjoy each other. It’s good for Adam to have a friend. Judy, I hope you don’t mind but you’ll be on the sofa bed in my private suite. It’s quite comfortable. Piers suggested I needed a larger suite with a sitting room for privacy. I’m glad now but at the time I thought it a waste of space.”

“Maybe he was thinking ahead,” Judy said.

Katie frowned. "Ahead of what?"

"After you're married. I presume Piers will move into Lavender Cottage." Judy's head moved to one side, her expression quizzical. "Is that what is worrying you?"

"A bit. What if he wants to live in Nottingham, near the clinic."

"I doubt that, but you need to talk to him about it."

"You're right. I will." Katie wasn't sure how she would bring up the subject. In fact she wasn't sure she'd follow through.

"Good mornin'!" Lydia, the young maid, called from the lounge. "I finished downstairs. What's next?"

"The Daisy Den is already occupied. I saw the lady go out early this morning so make up her room first. The Marina Suite next. The Larkins will be here tomorrow. Judy, would you mind giving Lydia a hand pulling out the sofa bed for the kids? Oh yes, and make sure there are enough towels in the Rose Suite for two guests. The Lavender Suite can wait until tomorrow."

"It's Good Friday tomorrow and mi' mam wants me to go to Father Boyd's house. She promised Father we'd help prepare for Easter. If I make up all the rooms today, then I'll only have the beds to make in the morning."

"Lydia, that's fine."

Katie had forgotten the Dickson family were devout Roman Catholics. Even though she was not quite sure what the event was on Good Friday, she smiled at the vision of Fred Dickson and wife, Pearl, leading their brood of seven children to church. She'd been raised Church of England and remembered Easter Sunday church service and no meat on Good Friday. Supper was always fish and chips and she remembered her dad being cranky because he wasn't allowed a ham sandwich at lunch. The memory lifted her cheeks into a smile. She missed her parents. She'd lost both of them only a year apart, her mother to cancer and her dad to a heart attack. She always reckoned he'd died of a broken heart. *But*, she thought, *I'm glad they didn't witness my divorce. Dad would be so angry with John for hurting me and Mum would be chuntering about what the neighbours would think. I wonder what they would think of me getting married a second time? Dad would like Piers and Mum would be delighted to have a doctor in the family.* Suddenly she felt a burden lift off her shoulders as though her parents had given her their blessing. She could hear her no nonsense dad saying, 'Katie, stop waffling and get on with it. Marry the man.' She looked upwards and said, "Thank you, Mum and Dad."

Katie slid open the patio door and stepped onto the verandah. The sun had burned off the mist and it felt warm on her face. She felt a gentle breeze as Doris' rocking chair gently moved.

"Good morning, Doris!" Katie sat in the chair opposite. There were times when she questioned her sanity as she talked to Doris, their resident ghost and Adam's wife

and protector. A soft breeze floated her presence in and out of the verandah and the empty chair rocking was a sign she was there. "I haven't thought of my parents in ages and today it seemed they gave me their blessing to marry Piers."

"I know how you doubt yourself," Doris whispered.

"All the time. What is wrong with me, Doris?"

"The best advice I can give is love. Love really does conquer all. Adam and I had our moments but we never stopped loving each other."

"I keep thinking of John. We loved each other and look what happened."

"Is your love for Piers the same? Think about it. Time for me to go." Doris' whisper faded into the breeze as the chair stood still. She was gone.

Katie couldn't think of John and Piers in the same breath. They were so different. Doris was right. Whatever she'd felt for John, it wasn't the same passion she felt for Piers.

She skipped into the kitchen to begin Easter dinner preparations. Flipping on Diana Krall, she sang along, realizing how appropriate the song was. "*The Look of Love ... la, la ...now that I've found you, never let go...la, la*" Singing her thoughts of just how much she loved Piers made her so happy.

She took the fresh mint bundle Adam had cut for her that morning and snipped off the leaves, chopping and swaying with the music. She had discarded the usual turkey and chose to roast a leg of spring lamb with mint sauce. Smiling to herself, she recognized that lamb was a good choice for Easter but it was also Piers' favourite. Leaving the mint to infuse in the vinegar, she took out all the ingredients to bake the Simnel Cake for Sunday.

The French doors to the rose garden patio opened. "Someone sounds happy," Adam said, "What changed this morning's pensive mood?"

"A chat with Doris and I love cooking with music."

"Any chance of a cup of tea?" Adam paused, seeing the kitchen counter covered in baking ingredients. "I'd use the Keurig machine but it doesn't taste the same as an old fashioned pot of tea." He hastily added, "I'll make it."

"Sir Walter hates that machine." Chimes came from the front. "Was that the door bell?" Katie looked at the clock. It was 11:30 but she wasn't expecting guests until after two.

Judy called, "I'll get it. I'm right here."

Katie heard the front door open and close. She listened intently as one of the voices sounded familiar. As Judy put her head around the morning room door, Katie heard a voice she neither expected nor wanted to hear.

“Carly Byron and guest have arrived early. I’ll register them. What room?”

“The Rose Suite.” Katie listened again. Perhaps she was mistaken? “Thanks.” She held her floured covered hands in the air as an excuse not to greet this unwanted guest.

The End of chapter one.

Do you want to read more? Click the link below.

Available for pre-order release date March 26th 2020.

[Click here for the retailer of choice](#)