

APRIL SNOW

Chapter One

Dana McGarry, on vacation for the first time as a single woman, arrived at the Lansdowne Club at 9 Fitzmaurice Place, just steps from Berkeley Square, in London's fashionable Mayfair on the morning of April 8, 1975. Her lawyer had filed papers for a legal separation from her husband Brett in January, and after four months of being under the watchful eyes of well-meaning family and friends, Dana was savoring every moment of her solo trip across the pond. She and Brett had always stayed at the nearby Chesterfield Hotel, but her beloved Colony Club in New York City enjoyed reciprocity with the Lansdowne Club, where she'd previously attended lunches and lectures while her husband met with clients for his Wall Street law firm. Undeterred by the steady English rain and dark clouds hanging over the slick gray streets, she stepped from one of London's fabled black taxis with renewed spirit, excited to think that the distinguished house in Berkeley Square would be her home for the next five days. After Dana checked in, the hall porter asked her if she would like tea brought to her room and then discreetly disappeared with her luggage, a small, welcoming gesture that stood in contrast to an impersonal hotel. Rather than immediately taking the lift to her room on the fifth floor, Dana stepped into the entrance hall and surveyed the club's interior, intending to explore Scottish architect Robert Adam's stately masterpiece commissioned in 1761 for King George III's prime minister, the Earl of Bute. Previously, she had limited herself to the dining room, never taking time to appreciate the club's historic beauty. Although rich with finely-crafted embellishments and Neoclassical splendor, the house was clearly showing signs of fatigue, and its understated elegance made the environment that much more comfortable. Dana knew she'd made the right choice. The club was an oasis of tradition and tranquility affording her the peace and privacy she needed.

When Dana arrived in her junior suite, she noticed a bouquet of flowers sitting on a table in the sitting area. Thinking they were compliments of the club, Dana opened the attached note and laughed out loud. The flowers had been sent by her childhood friend, Johnny Cirone. The message read, "Take Phoebe shopping and buy up the town. Whatever you do, enjoy yourself. Love, Johnny."

Dr. Phoebe Cirone, who was in London attending a cardiology convention, was Johnny's sister. Their father, John Cirone, known affectionately to Dana and her brother Matthew as Uncle John, was the head of the House of Cirone, a manufacturer of ladies eveningwear. Having a passion for medicine from an early age, Phoebe had never expressed interest in clothes or haute couture, leaving Johnny to reluctantly carry on family tradition by working for his father. Dana's parents, Phil and Virginia Martignetti, had been friends with the Cirones since before her birth.

Dana, pleased to see a porcelain tea service had already arrived, took her cup to the window and sipped the Darjeeling as she observed the new plantings in the courtyard garden. The peace she'd felt a few minutes ago was gone, however. Something about Johnny's note, as thoughtful as it was, unnerved her. Johnny and her mother called daily to see how she was doing. Dana sensed their concern, although she felt it was unwarranted. What did they think—that she was going to kill herself because the divorce would soon be final? They obviously didn't recognize her personal strength and resolve. Dana worked at New York City's B. Altman, and the previous December she'd formed the department store's first Teen Advisory Board. She had also succeeded in getting Ira Neimark, the store's executive vice president, to sign off on installing a teen makeup counter on the main selling floor over the objections of Helen Kavanagh, junior buyer, who thought youth-oriented strategies like those at London's Biba, were a waste of time and money. Despite

these personal triumphs, she'd taken aggressive steps to further advance her career, leaving her comfortable job in the marketing department for the position of junior accessories buyer. She had requested time off for this visit to London immediately after settling into the new assignment, and that alone was proof that she knew how to take care of herself.

Dana had been equally aggressive in terminating her marriage to Brett. Papers for a legal separation had been filed in January by Dana's lawyer when she discovered that Brett was having an affair with fellow litigator Janice Conlon, a saucy and impertinent young woman from California. Negotiations for a final settlement were proceeding smoothly, with no protests originating from either Brett or his lawyer lest the firm be apprised of his misconduct with the audacious Conlon. In the four months since their separation, Dana had realized that Brett's dalliance with the abrasive Conlon had merely been a catalyst for the end of their relationship since there had been something far deeper and more troubling in their marriage: Brett's growing neglect of Dana as he vigorously pursued partnership with the firm. His work always served as a convenient excuse to pick and choose his time with Dana and in the long run, that grim reality had proven intolerable. Within days of learning of Brett's infidelity, Dana contacted an attorney and moved from her Murray Hill apartment to a carriage house a few blocks away in Sniffen Court.

Given the decisive actions in her personal and professional life, Dana therefore felt smothered at times by the daily concerns of others. As for her traveling abroad alone, she felt more than competent to take care of herself. When Brett had been with her in London, they were rarely together. He usually spent days working, and evenings meeting with clients, joining Dana for late dinners, if at all. He was up and out by 7:00 a.m. She'd always hoped that the next trip would be better, but this was never the case. Traveling alone? It was all she knew.

Yes, it had all happened just four months ago, illustrating how the course of a life can change so radically and quickly. But was she ecstatically happy now that a new phase of her life and career had begun, with Brett being almost surgically excised from the picture? No, she wasn't jubilant about anything at present, but she was content, at peace with the decisions she had made to take care of herself and her future. In the words of her father, she had discovered that she had "a very good life" despite longstanding marital woes and formidable professional challenges. Many of her friends had urged her to re-enter the dating scene since she was almost thirty and the clock was ticking, but Dana didn't miss married life in the least and had no interest whatsoever in dating, especially guys described as the perfect match: upwardly mobile professionals, or "Brett clones," the apt description provided by Andrew Ricci, Dana's good friend and display director at the store. Besides, marriage was not the only path to a fulfilled life. In Dana's estimation, happiness also resulted from pursuing a creative dream, enjoying good friendships and the myriad interests that gave her immense pleasure, such as travel, literature, films, and lectures on a wide variety of topics. Being suddenly single was not a condition to be cured but rather an opportunity to be savored.

A line from Dickens came to mind as she thought of events that had altered her life: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." Dana had survived the tumultuous weeks of the previous December, when she realized her marriage was over, but surely this was now the best of times, was it not? She smiled as she contemplated her walk tomorrow morning to Piccadilly for breakfast at Fortnum & Mason, followed by a long and leisurely visit to Hatchards, London's oldest bookshop. The thought of Dickens reminded her of the delight she took in finding rare editions of the classics, or even first editions of lesser-known authors. Today, however, she was going to enjoy Richoux's delicious risotto when she lunched with Phoebe, who was staying within walking distance at the Grosvenor House on Park Lane. Filled with a new surge of energy, the blue-eyed Dana freshened up, brushed her short blond hair, and grabbed a shawl and a pair of unlined leather gloves. The clouds were beginning to part, and the steady English drizzle had let up, but it was still a nippy fifty-four degrees—a perfect spring day in London.

Rays of sunshine were reflected by leaded windows in the rows of eighteenth century townhomes Dana passed as she strolled leisurely through Berkeley Square. It was only eleven thirty and she had an hour

before meeting Phoebe at her hotel, enough time for a short detour across Hill Street and Hays Mews to the Farm Street Church, also known as the Jesuit Church of the Immaculate Conception. Years earlier, she'd been sitting on a bench in Mount Street Gardens when she looked up and beheld one of the church's open gothic portals that seemed so inviting, beckoning her to enter and pray. Then as now, it had been a glorious April day, the kind celebrated by Chaucer in the opening lines of the *Canterbury Tales*, when spring rains provide rich "liquor" for flowers suffering winter's drought.

Dana arrived at the church and chose to enter from Mount Street Gardens rather than Farm Street, as she'd done on her original visit. In the transept to the right of Our Lady of Farm Street statue was the Sacred Heart Chapel, and this is where Dana chose to pray in deference to the Sisters of the Sacred Heart, who'd taught her for twelve years in her youth. She knelt in the third pew, said a decade of the rosary, and then sat, looking up to admire, as she always did, the glorious painting of the Sacred Heart flanked by four saints above an inlaid marble altar with three brass reliefs. But instead of finding peace in this pious setting, the silence suddenly became deafening, and the alabaster walls of the chapel began to feel close, confining. A wave of emotion engulfed her, and she cried uncontrollably, questioning her impulsive decision to end her eight-year marriage—and without considering her vows taken before God, family, and friends. What a hypocrite she felt herself to be—a selfish hypocrite who had turned her back on the faith that was such an integral part of her life.

Glancing at her watch, Dana saw that it was almost noon. She needed to pull herself together and be on her way to meet Phoebe. She took a deep breath, wiped away her tears, and walked outside to a bench in Mount Street Gardens, where she would spend a few moments composing herself.

In the sacristy, a priest was marking the readings for the twelve-thirty mass in the gilt-edged lectionary when he heard anguished sobs emanating from the Sacred Heart Chapel. Curious, he stepped into the sanctuary in time to see a young woman exiting the side door leading to the gardens. He followed her and observed her sitting on a bench fifteen yards away. He folded his arms, closed his eyes, and said a brief prayer.

* * *

Looking in her compact mirror, Dana wiped away the mascara beneath her eyes and reapplied a bit of powder to her cheeks. She didn't want Phoebe to see that she'd been crying. What could she possibly say in answer to any questions her friend might have? That she was upset over the abrupt manner in which she'd dissolved an eight-year marriage to an inattentive man who'd cheated on her? No, the emotions that had spilled forth in the chapel had taken Dana by surprise, and they needed to be processed in private moments of reflection.

Dana had been resting her eyes when she looked up and saw a priest approaching the bench. The Jesuit, a tall man in his early fifties, walked with a confident gait, and the smile on his face was evident when he was still several feet away.

"Good morning," he said. "Lovely day." He could tell the young woman was upset and, in point of fact, she wasn't the only one he'd encountered on the grounds who needed consolation or, at the very least, a friendly smile.

"Yes, Father, it is," Dana replied. "A splendid day."

"Are you on holiday, or are we blessed to have you as a new parishioner?" he asked.

Dana examined the priest's face more carefully. He wore rimless glasses, and pale blue eyes regarded her kindly beneath close-cut salt and pepper hair. He was dressed in a black clerical suit and looked to be strong and vigorous despite his gentle manner.

"On holiday, Father," Dana replied. "I come here whenever I'm in London and wanted to stop in and . . . visit. I was taught by the Sacred Heart sisters back in New York."

"A New Yorker!" Father Macaulay said. "And a member of the family, so to speak. May I sit?" he

asked, motioning to the bench.

A member of the family, Dana thought, again fighting back tears. *Not anymore.*

“I’m sorry, Father,” Dana mumbled, rising to leave. “I’m meeting someone and I’m late.”

Father Macaulay nodded. “I hope you’ll visit again. I’m here in the church or the gardens every morning from nine until I say mass. If you can’t find me, just tell the sacristan that you’re looking for Father Charles Macaulay.”

“Thank you, Father. Have a good day.”

Biting her lip to fight back fresh tears, Dana and Macaulay shook hands. The priest watched Dana walk out of the gardens, sensing that she was in distress. He was a good judge of people, and he thought that Dana would surely return to the church before she boarded a plane for New York City. Somewhere in her soul, he thought, there was unfinished business.

* * *

Wearing sunglasses, Dana walked for five minutes along Mount Street until she reached the Grosvenor House. Phoebe was waiting in the lounge, and after they exchanged warm greetings, they left the hotel for Richoux, which was two blocks away on South Audley Street.

The two women were shown to a small table in the dimly-lit restaurant owing to the dark wood paneling in the main dining room. When Dana removed her sunglasses, Phoebe immediately saw that Dana was upset. Her eyes were puffy and her smile was forced. Phoebe cocked her head and raised her eyebrows, as if to say, *Do you feel like talking about it?*

“I’m fine,” Dana said, brushing aside the concern. “Nothing worth discussing. Now tell me about you, how’s the convention?”

The two women chatted over lunch, Phoebe speaking of the lectures she’d attended on anticoagulation therapy, angioplasty, and catheterization for the diagnosis of coronary artery disease. In turn, Dana described her new duties at B. Altman. They laughed at Johnny Cirone’s daily calls and continued concern for Dana since her separation, although Dana was reminded yet again of the excessive attention she was receiving.

“We have to get him married off,” Phoebe said, “or at least find him a serious girlfriend. He’s becoming a mother hen.” She paused, knowing that Dana was holding back something painful, but decided not to press the matter. “By the way, my dad has an offer on his house, and he’s in contract to purchase the estate sale on East 79th Street. It’s a big renovation, so he’s hoping to get approved by the co-op board quickly and start the demo. Johnny is already interviewing contractors.”

John Cirone was moving to Manhattan since his Long Island home seemed far too large since the death of his wife two years earlier. He’d accepted a seat on the board of the Metropolitan Opera, and Johnny was helping his dad make the long-overdue transition to the city—and to the present, away from thoughts of his deceased wife, Lena.

“It sounds like the convention is keeping you pretty busy,” Dana said. “Would you like me to pick up Uncle John’s cigars at Sautter’s? It’s a few blocks from the Lansdowne.”

“That would be a lifesaver,” Phoebe said. “I have two days of seminars on using something called a stent to open up clogged arteries instead of always resorting to bypass surgery. It would be a non-invasive procedure, but most cardiologists think it’s still years away.” Phoebe suddenly burst out laughing. “And here I am, bringing my father cigars, which is the last thing a cardiologist should do.”

The two women finished lunch, Phoebe heading to the convention for afternoon lectures, and Dana returning to the Lansdowne Club, where she finished unpacking.

Dana sipped afternoon tea while paging through a book of poems she’d found lying on the end table by the sofa, her thoughts returning to her display of emotion that morning. Brett had indeed been quickly and surgically excised from her life, perhaps too quickly, and yet she had received no judgments about the

decision to do so from her parents. She was aware, of course, that Virginia had always been a bit leery of Brett, even at the very beginning of their courtship. As for her father, he was quite unflappable and had reminded Dana that things always work out in the end, which was a part of his lifelong, homespun philosophy that she found so comforting. And yet Dana couldn't shake the realization that Brett, despite all of his shortcomings, was a man she'd loved for over eight years. Should she have given him another chance? After all, the marriage hadn't been *all* bad. The visit to the chapel, she concluded, had reminded her of Catholic dogma regarding marriage: it was indissoluble. Mount Street Gardens, the chapel, the brass panels—they'd brought to mind her many years with the Sisters of the Sacred Heart, causing her to second guess her decision.

Leafing through the slightly-worn pages—she thought that older books had such character—she saw Wordsworth's "Ode on Intimations of Immortality." It was one of her favorite poems. She especially liked the lines towards the end.

Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower;
We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind;
In the primal sympathy
Which having been must ever be;
In the soothing thoughts that spring
Out of human suffering;
In the faith that looks through death,
In years that bring the philosophic mind.

The sentiment was essentially that of her father, who had a "philosophic mind" when it came to handling disappointment. There had been good times in the marriage, but some things were beyond repair, and Dana had indeed retained strength in what remained behind, which was a full life that included friendships and opportunity. Dana realized how important this trip was—far more than a break from her daily routine or an enjoyable shopping spree. On her own, she could privately mourn her marriage and process her emotions, opening her mind and heart for whatever lay ahead. She was at peace again, ready for the rest of her stay in London. Still, she wondered if Father Macaulay would share her perspective. The priest had emanated kindness and understanding in the brief minutes she'd been in his presence, and now, feeling stronger, she decided to visit him again before she left London. He'd demonstrated genuine concern, and she wanted to hear his soothing voice one more time.

Chapter Two

After a good night's sleep, Dana arrived at Fortnum & Mason, located at 181 Piccadilly, at eight o'clock in the morning. An hourly tribute to the founders begun in 1951, the four-foot models of William Fortnum and Hugh Mason emerged from the turquoise and gold clock and bowed to each other with punctual civility as the carillon bells sounded eight times. Dana was seated in the Buttery, an intimate dining room on the mezzanine level. She ordered coffee and a croissant and began reading the *Times* when her thoughts drifted to the shifting tide of events at B. Altman since January. While she had experienced great success with the teen makeup section and the Teen Advisory Board, new challenges had presented themselves almost immediately, and she'd found herself at odds—not for the first time—with Helen Kavanagh, the former junior buyer.

Struggles were unavoidable in everyone's career, but Dana felt like progress was achieved at a pace of two steps forward and one step back. In January, Helen's junior department had been broken up, and she became the divisional manager, overseeing women's sportswear and dresses as well as juniors. In turn, Dana had stepped up to the position of junior accessories buyer. For Helen, however, her new job, while a promotion, no longer had power or status thanks to the arrival of Dawn Mello two years earlier. Mello filled the newly-created position of vice president and fashion director and had been hand-picked for the task by Ira Neimark, who was hired to make B. Altman more competitive in mainstream retailing, thus updating its stodgy image. Dawn was solely responsible for charting the store's fashion direction, approving new lines and making buying decisions that were influenced by her extensive European travels to scout for new trends. With twenty-five years of buying experience, Helen resented reporting to Dawn and was now angry that she had no control of her staff's merchandise choices, leaving her with boring budgets and operational issues.

In the months following Helen's promotion, Dana enjoyed a good working relationship with Dawn, who wholeheartedly approved of Dana's suggestion to build a small free-standing accessories "store" in the junior department. Dawn had challenged the buyers to think of creative ways to compete with boutique-mania thriving all over the city, from Madison to Third Avenue, and she especially liked Dana's idea to market the proposed accessory section, called "Nantucket," with merchandise popular on Nantucket Island: handmade lightship bags decorated with scrimshaw pieces, colorful ribbon belts, and canvas duffle bags from Marblehead, Massachusetts. Dawn not only gave Dana the green light but approved an expensive build-out to replicate cedar shingle houses on the island, custom-designed by Mark Senger, president of Senger Display Company, B. Altman's vendor for holiday windows and major store renovations. Helen went directly to Dawn, asking her to halt the project or defer the cost to the store, but she was overruled. Dawn thought the Nantucket concept had potential for growth and believed that Helen should be responsible for the expense because her department would ultimately benefit from the new brand. Dana had found herself in the middle of a power play between two formidable women, and she was an easy target for Helen's misery. Her exciting new job had once again become nothing more than a game of politics.

Dana lingered over breakfast until the store officially opened so she could buy a few favorite items for her room at the Lansdowne, ginger and lemon tea and ginger chocolates, before dashing next door into Hatchards Bookshop. She had almost an hour before the lecture on portrait miniatures, and enough time to browse the tables and shelves, picking out several titles, and a lovely edition on eighteenth and nineteenth century portrait miniatures that would be the perfect complement for the upcoming lecture.

She purchased the books cradled in her arms and took a short taxi ride to the historic Hertford House on Manchester Square, where the Wallace Collection was located. The small museum had been established in 1897 from the private collection acquired by Sir Richard Wallace and the third and fourth Marquesses of

Hertford. Wallace's widow had bequeathed the entire collection to Great Britain on the condition that admission would always remain free to the general public. The collection included European paintings, portrait miniatures, sculpture, eighteenth century French furniture, Sevres and Meissen porcelain, and Oriental and European arms and armor. Despite its many renovations over the years, the Wallace Collection still had the graciousness of a private town mansion of the period.

Dana immediately went to the Sixteenth Century Gallery on the main floor where twenty chairs had been arranged. Just as the lecture was about to begin, Dana seated herself next to a slim young woman who, although conservatively dressed in a tweed skirt and sweater, wore large antique Art Nouveau silver jewelry. The woman had thick, wavy hair parted softly in the middle and pulled behind her head in a bun. Her large brown eyes were attentive and aimed at the front of the gallery except for a brief moment when she turned slightly towards Dana and smiled.

The lecture began, and Dana focused her attention on the speaker, a balding English gentleman in his sixties named Basil Trivett. He wore a dark gray suit and a burgundy foulard bow tie, with half spectacles perched on the end of his nose. He spoke slowly and distinctly, as he explained that miniature portraits first appeared in illuminated manuscripts painstakingly produced by hand in the High Middle Ages. By the early sixteenth century, portrait miniatures were used by royalty at French and English courts and were painted in watercolor on stretched vellum parchment or enamel. The first glimpse Henry VIII received of his fourth wife, Anne of Cleves, was courtesy of court painter and miniaturist Hans Holbein. King Henry carried images of some of his wives in lockets before they lost his favor—or their lives.

In 1768, artists in London established the Royal Academy of Arts, with miniatures displayed at its annual exhibition. When photography was introduced in 1839, however, miniature portraits were eclipsed by the accurate likenesses produced by early cameras. A revival occurred in 1896 when the Royal Society of Miniature Painters was founded. Trivett concluded by explaining that miniatures were still highly prized by art patrons and were quite collectible. A question and answer session ensued, during which the woman next to Dana asked several questions that clearly demonstrated her superior knowledge of miniatures

When the lecture concluded, Dana turned to the demure woman and said, "Your questions were as interesting as the lecture, particularly your inquiry on the British colonial period, which I love." She paused. "Pardon me—my name is Dana McGarry. Would you care to join me for lunch in the courtyard?"

"I'm Abby Kempf," the woman said, extending a small, frail hand. Her head was slightly lowered even though she looked Dana in the eyes as she spoke. "Yes, I'd be happy to join you. It's a beautiful day."

During the first few minutes of their lunch, Abby spoke quietly, expounding on Trivett's facts about miniatures to include stories about their history in France and Germany. Dana was overwhelmed by Abby's continued display of artistic knowledge, but at times she was distracted by the intensity she brought to the subject. Dana was more than a bit curious about her passion for the miniatures.

"Are you a collector?" Dana asked.

"No, but I do have three enamel miniatures, one by Henry Bone. They were wedding gifts from my mother-in-law." Abby explained that she'd majored in art history at Sarah Lawrence, spending her senior year in Florence and remaining there an additional two years after graduation. She had then interned for a year at Sotheby's in London.

"I don't enjoy a nine-to-five routine," Abby said with a shy smile, "so I share my knowledge and passion by giving art lectures in England and the U.S. I book my travel schedule around the lectures."

“Then you must know Rosamond Bernier,” Dana said enthusiastically. “I attend all her lectures at the Met. We were introduced last year, and she invited me to her after-party at Café des Artistes. A beautiful lady and so gifted.”

“She and my parents have mutual friends in Peapack, New Jersey, and we’ve spoken at summer parties. When she heard I was putting together slide presentations, she was very generous and gave me invaluable advice. She’s exceptional.”

“Are you from Peapack?” Dana asked.

“No,” Abby replied. “From nearby Bernardsville.”

“I grew up on Long Island,” Dana said, “although I’ve been living in Manhattan since I graduated from college.”

“I have a flat in London, but I consider Manhattan my home,” Abby said. “I’ll be traveling most of the summer before returning to New York in the fall.”

Dana and Abby exchanged phone numbers, and Abby once again grew more reserved as she stood to leave.

“I hope we’ll visit in New York,” Dana said. “It’s been a lovely lunch.”

Abby merely nodded, smiled, and left.

Dana had thoroughly enjoyed both the lecture and the lunch, although she sensed a very mysterious air surrounding Abby Kempf. It was also strange that, aside from a brief reference to her mother-in-law, there was no mention of her husband or marriage. Well, strange or not, Dana was grateful to be in the company of someone who didn’t ask personal questions. She looked forward to seeing her again.

While Dana had listened to Basil Trivett’s words intently, her thoughts had occasionally drifted to her new Nantucket boutique and how she would merchandise it. After all, Helen had to approve her budget since the department would carry junior accessories. In spite of Helen’s brusque manner, business would go on. Dana had no doubt that the concept would be successful and, as soon as it was, that Helen would come around.

