

## Chapter Four

Marigold Haunt wiped her mouth with the back of her hand as she lifted her face from the toilet. Damn morning sickness. She flushed and closed the lid. Her head pounded and her heart ached. Her breathing was a dry wheeze. She wished her husband, Jeff, was here.

This was her third time vomiting this morning and it sucked, but it wasn't the worst of her problems.

Ever since she became pregnant, Marigold had been hearing voices. She hadn't told Jeff yet and she planned to tell him last night, but she just didn't have the heart when he came home. He looked so tired.

All she wanted to do was make him feel at home when he walked through the door. Last night when he had slumped into his favorite chair, she kissed him above his right eyebrow, which he loved. She wished there was something else in the house besides macaroni and hot dogs, but they were beyond broke ever since she lost her job at the greeting card company. She boiled the dogs and macaroni in the same pot for the third night in a row.

Jeff didn't complain. He never complained anymore, not in the latter part of their 28 years of marriage. He was sweet to her and called her pet names like "sweetheart" and "Snufflelovetokiss." He still called her beautiful, too, even though she knew she was anything but. Her once chestnut hair was now streaked with white strands by her ears. Her cheeks were becoming jowls, and the wrinkles around her mouth were...troubling. Make-up didn't seem to erase them. Even before she became pregnant, she sported a slab of belly fat above her crotch. Her breasts sagged and looked sloppy. She certainly *looked* her age.

But Jeff didn't seem to mind. In fact, he said he even liked her extra curves. "More to grab," he had always said, squeezing her breasts from behind. A few months ago, when she still had a job and they shared a dual income, he sometimes brought home lilies, her favorites. Whenever "Strange Magic" played on the radio, he would pull her from the sofa to dance around the room. It was their song.

His kisses were always genuine and gentle. When he said, "I love you," every morning before work, he meant it. His green eyes couldn't lie to her. And when they could, he always had to look away. In the 28 years they've been married, he never looked away when he said, "I love you." That's how she knew it was real.

She felt like she could tell him anything; except that she was hearing voices. It was mostly because she wasn't sure she could fully believe it herself, and also because of Jeff's mother's history with schizophrenia. The last thing she wanted was to evoke the kind of panic she saw in him after he told her about how his mother died. It would be unbearable to see that look in his eyes again.

Besides, it was only the one voice anyway, and it hadn't bothered her all morning, which was a blessing.

In the first couple of weeks the voice started off as a whisper, like a best friend telling her a secret. But by the second month, it grew louder and deeper. It called her "Goldie" and laughed. Its chuckle was sadistic and giddy. It was so close to her ear that it gave her goosebumps. She didn't tell her doctor about it, either. She was afraid he would suggest medication and she didn't want to do that. Not with the baby.

But the voice kept her up at night.

Whenever she tried to sleep, she imagined the voice smiling in her head. Its gapped, skinny teeth looked like baby fingers. She hadn't slept a full night in months.

And then, there was the vomiting.

Speaking of which.

Her stomach churned and she opened the lid again. Her cheeks swelled and her neck bobbed. She heaved into the toilet. Her heart raced as the orange vomit splashed the water. It looked like veal parmesan. As she stared at it float, she wondered when the last time she had parmesan anything was. God, having cravings when you're poor sucks. Marigold rubbed her eyes. Her fingers and hair smelled of sick.

After a moment's respite, she held onto the wood paneling on the sink for leverage and stood up.

Her extended belly poked out from her Garfield pajama top. Thick stretch marks curved around her stomach like bruised veins. Since losing her job a few weeks ago she had worn nothing but pajamas. Why get dressed if there was nowhere to go but back to bed?

As she looked at herself in the mirror, she saw what all the people at the hospital must have seen—A woman who looked too *old* to be having a baby. But she didn't care what they thought. She—

A sharp twist hit her in the stomach again, and forced her back to her knees. Marigold heaved into the toilet and got vomit all over the seat and some of it on the floor this time. The vomit exploded out of her. A lot of it got in her ponytail and some of it on her hands. Her heart raced hard. Her eyes bulged.

She was so enervated that she had trouble breathing. She rubbed her baby bump, and even heard her child groan. Or maybe that was just her stomach. It had all been too much. Five times in one morning was a record. She closed the lid and laid her face against the cool toilet seat. It was comforting on her cheek. In a few moments, she was out cold.

Her lips twitched in her sleep.