Shopaholic and Sister

Sophie Kinsella

Chapter 1

OK. I can do this. No problem.

It's simply a matter of letting my higher self take over, achieving enlightenment, and becoming a radiant being of white light.

Easy-peasy.

Surreptitiously I adjust myself on my yoga mat so I'm facing the sun directly, and push down the spaghetti straps of my top. I don't see why you can't reach ultimate bliss consciousness and get an even tan at the same time.

I'm sitting on a hillside in the middle of Sri Lanka at the Blue Hills Resort and Spiritual Retreat, and the view is spectacular. Hills and tea plantations stretch ahead, then merge into a deep-blue sky. I can see the bright colours of tea-pickers in the fields, and, if I swivel my head a little, glimpse a distant elephant padding slowly along between the bushes.

And when I swivel my head even further, I can see Luke. My husband. He's the one on the blue yoga mat, in the cut-off linen trousers and tatty old top, sitting cross-legged with his eyes closed.

I know. It's just unbelievable. After ten months of honeymoon, Luke has turned into a totally different person from the man I married. The old corporate Luke has vanished. The suits have disappeared. He's tanned and lean, his hair is long and sun-bleached and he's still got a few of the little plaits he had put in on Bondi Beach. Round his wrist is a friendship bracelet he bought in the Masai Mara, and in his ear is a tiny silver hoop.

Luke Brandon with an earring! Luke Brandon sitting cross-legged!

As though he can feel my gaze, he opens his eyes and smiles, and I beam back happily. Ten months married. And not a single row.

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Well. You know. Only the odd little one.

'Siddhasana,' says our yoga teacher, Chandra, and obediently I place my right foot on my left thigh. 'Clear your minds of all extraneous thought.'

OK. Clear my mind. Concentrate.

I don't want to boast, but I find clearing my mind pretty easy. I don't quite get why anyone would find it difficult! I mean, not-thinking has to be a lot easier than thinking, doesn't it?

In fact, the truth is I'm a bit of a natural at yoga. We've only been on this retreat for five days but already I can do the lotus and everything! I was even thinking I might set up as a yoga teacher when we go back home.

Maybe I could set up in partnership with Trudie Styler. God, yes! And we could launch a range of yoga-wear too, all soft greys and whites, with a little logo . . .

'Focus on your breathing,' Chandra is saying.

Oh, right, yes. Breathing.

Breathe in . . . breathe out. Breathe in . . . breathe out. Breathe . . .

God, my nails look fab. I had them done at the spa - little pink butterflies on a white background. And the antennae are little sparkly diamonds. They are so sweet. Except one seems to have fallen off. I must get that fixed-

'Becky.' Chandra's voice makes me jump. He's standing right in front of me, gazing at me with this look he has. Kind of gentle and all-knowing, like he can see right inside your mind.

'You do very well, Becky,' he says. 'You have a beautiful spirit.'

I feel a sparkle of delight all over. I, Rebecca Brandon, née Bloomwood, have a beautiful spirit! I knew it!

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'You have an unworldly soul,' he adds in his soft voice, and I stare back, totally mesmerized.

'Material possessions aren't important to me,' I say breathlessly. 'All that matters to me is yoga.'

'You have found your path.' Chandra smiles.

There's an odd kind of snorting sound from Luke's direction, and I look round to see him glancing over at us in amusement.

I knew Luke wasn't taking this seriously.

'This is a private conversation between me and my guru, thank you very much,' I say crossly.

Although actually I shouldn't be surprised. We were warned about this on the first day of the yoga course. Apparently when one partner finds higher spiritual enlightenment, the other partner can react with scepticism and even jealousy.

'Soon you will be walking on the hot coals.' Chandra gestures with a smile to the nearby pit of smouldering, ashy coals, and a nervous laugh goes round the group. This evening Chandra and some of his top yoga students are going to demonstrate walking on the coals for the rest of us. This is what we're all supposed to be aiming for. Apparently you attain a state of bliss so great you can't actually feel the coals burning your feet. You're totally pain-free!

What I'm secretly hoping is, it'll work when I wear six-inch stilettos, too.

Chandra adjusts my arms and moves on, and I close my eyes, letting the sun warm my face. Sitting here on this hillside in the middle of nowhere, I feel so pure and calm. It's not just Luke who's changed over the last ten months. I have, too. I've grown up. My priorities have altered. In fact, I'm a different person. I mean, look at me now, doing yoga at a spiritual retreat. My old friends probably wouldn't even recognize me!

At Chandra's instruction, we all move into the Vajrasana pose. From where I am, I can just see an old Sri Lankan man carrying two old carpet bags approaching Chandra. They have a brief conversation, during which Chandra keeps shaking his

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head, then the old man trudges away again over the scrubby hillside. When he's out of earshot, Chandra turns to face the group, rolling his eyes.

'This man is a merchant. He asks if any of you are interested in gems. Necklaces, cheap bracelets. I tell him your minds are on higher things.'

A few people near me shake their heads as though in disbelief. One woman, with long red hair, looks affronted.

'Couldn't he see we were in the middle of meditation?' she says.

'He has no understanding of your spiritual devotion.' Chandra looks seriously around the group. 'It will be the same with many others in the world. They will not understand that meditation is food for your soul. You have no need for . . . sapphire bracelet!'

A few people nod in appreciation.

'Aquamarine pendant with platinum chain,' Chandra continues dismissively. 'How does this compare to the radiance of inner enlightenment?'

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