

A Sample Chapter from *The Betrayal* by Marina Martindale

Emily St. Claire reached for another tissue to dab the sweat off her forehead and grab her water bottle, but the once-cold liquid had turned lukewarm. She took a few swallows and glanced at the clock on the waiting room wall. It was only eleven-fifteen. The air conditioning had stopped working at nine forty-five. Ninety minutes of down time and the office was sweltering. She heard Dr. Lerner's voice coming from the hallway. He was busy performing a root canal and having to apologize to his patient for the added discomfort of the heat.

The front door opened as she gulped down the last of her water. Andrea, who worked in the same building, stepped inside. Her makeup was beaded and creased and wisps of her red hair had stuck to the sweat on the side of her face. She walked up to the window separating Emily's desk from the waiting room.

"It feels even hotter in here than it does in our office."

"Must be one of Murphy's Laws," replied Emily. "The air conditioning will always conk out on the hottest day of the summer."

"Any word on when they'll get it fixed?"

Emily shrugged her shoulders. "Your guess is as good as mine. I tried calling the property manager again about twenty minutes ago, but I'm still getting a busy signal. I'm sure by now they're aware of the problem."

"Yeah, I kept getting busy signals too, which means they must *really* know. Meantime Dr. Hapner had me reschedule all our afternoon patients. Turns out two of them are really sick, so they're on their way right now. Then, once we're done, we're closing up shop and calling it a day." Andrea chuckled. "I love the idea of having an afternoon off, but why does it have to be on a day when it's over a hundred and ten degrees outside?"

Emily gave her another shrug. "It's the price we pay for living in Phoenix. At least we don't get snowed in during the winter."

"Yeah, but a good, old-fashioned ice storm would sure feel nice right about now. And I'll bet you're glad now that you got the new haircut."

Emily ran her fingers through her short, blonde hair. It felt strange to no longer have her long locks. "It's lower maintenance all right, but Jesse wasn't too thrilled with it."

“That figures. Have you told him yet? ”

“No, not yet.”

“Well, keep me posted. I’m anxious to hear how he reacts. Meantime, I have to get back to work. I just wanted to stick my head in the door to see how you’re doing. Hopefully, we’ll all be back to normal by tomorrow morning.”

“I’m sure we will be.”

“Are we still on for lunch Friday?”

“You bet. See you, Andrea.”

Andrea took her leave while Emily called the property manager once again. This time her call went through. After punching a few buttons, she got a live person on the line, who told her a repairman was on the way, but to not expect the air conditioning to be back online until much later in the day. She heard approaching footsteps as she hung up. Dr. Lerner had finished with his patient. His normally crisp, white shirt was wrinkled and soaked with sweat.

“Any word on the air conditioning?”

“I’m afraid it won’t be back on until the end of the day. Meantime your eleven-thirty has already rescheduled for next Tuesday. Your next patient is due right after lunch.”

Dr. Lerner frowned. “And if it’s this hot now, it’ll be unbearable by this afternoon. Go ahead and take care of Mrs. Baxter. After that, I want you to call everyone who was supposed to come in this afternoon and have them reschedule. We’re taking the rest of the day off. Hopefully, we’ll all be back to normal by tomorrow morning.”

“I’m sure we will be. Thanks, doctor.”

He nodded and walked away. Fifteen minutes later Emily stepped out into the blazing midday sun. She smiled to herself as she walked across the parking lot. She decided she would stop at the grocery store on the way home so she could prepare a surprise dinner for Jesse. She hopped into her car, fired up the engine, and turned the air conditioning on high. After a few hot moments, the air began to feel deliciously cool. A smile broke out across her face as she drove off. Tonight’s dinner would be the perfect opportunity for her to tell Jesse the time had come for him to keep his end of their bargain.

She soon pulled into the grocery store parking lot and hunted for a space. Once inside, she grabbed a cart headed down the aisles. Tonight she would prepare her famous chicken divan—one of Jesse’s favorites. She picked out her ingredients and tossed a bouquet of fresh flowers into

her cart before she headed to the checkout lane. Ten minutes later she pulled into her driveway and frowned. Annette's white Civic was parked in front of the house. Jesse's assistant usually didn't come on Wednesdays, so something unexpected must have come up.

Emily sighed as she pressed the button to open the garage door. Shutting down the engine, she quickly grabbed the grocery bags and hurried out of the hot garage. The air conditioning felt heavenly as she stepped inside the house and headed straight to the kitchen.

"Hi guys. I'm home."

No response. The house seemed unusually quiet. She set the bags on the counter and went down the hallway. Jesse had converted one of the downstairs bedrooms into his office. She tapped on the door and smiled as she slowly pushed it open.

"Hey guys. The air conditioning went out and I'm—"

Her smile faded. The room was empty. The lights were out and Jesse's computer was shutdown. She started getting a funny feeling, but quickly brushed it off. Perhaps Jesse and Annette were out by the pool. She went to the living room and opened the sliding glass door.

"Jesse! Annette!"

No answer. The backyard was eerily quiet and no one was by the pool. She closed the door and headed toward the staircase. The upper floor contained the master suite and a rarely used guest bedroom. Jesse would be leaving for Houston on Friday to facilitate a seminar. Perhaps he and Annette had gone upstairs to decide what he should pack. She took a deep breath and started up the stairs. As she turned on the landing and headed up the remaining flight she heard muffled voices behind the bedroom door. Jesse must have had the TV on. She turned the knob and stepped inside.