

## Chapter 1

Life is complicated and mine's no different.

On the plus side, I'm married to a man I totally love, we live on the top floor of a building in the romantic city of San Francisco, and I'm pregnant with our first child. Oh, and I'm rich – that's a plus too. On the down side, I'm married to a cop who keeps the worst hours, I'm stuck in one city instead of jetting around the world as I please, and I'm pregnant. It's remarkable how the same details of my life could be both positives and negatives.

And then there's the separation from my body issue. I'm not sure whether I would put it in the plus or minus column. It began six years ago when I was in a car accident. Instead of a get-together with the grim reaper, I leapt out of my body and kept on enjoying life. Actually, I thought I was dead and a ghost, but as it turned out, my body was in a coma and my spirit just wandered away from the accident. When my essence was reunited with my body and I came out of my coma, I thought my meandering days were over. But that wasn't the case.

A few nights ago, I wanted a midnight snack, something I do a lot now since I'm pregnant. So I went to the kitchen to make an omelet. As I rummaged around for some ham to add to the eggs, Dodge, my husband, rushed in with his service weapon pulled. He heard the noise and assumed an intruder, since I was asleep in our bed.

It was a tense few moments when we both walked back and stared at my body.

“Samantha, how is this possible?” Dodge's glance bounced between me and my body.

I shrugged and continued to munch on the ham I brought with me.

Dodge reached down and felt my body's neck. “You've got a nice strong pulse.”

“Well, that's good.” I laughed to hide my unease and asked the question on my mind, “Do you think I'm in a coma again?”

It was his turn to shrug. “You need to get back in?”

“Now, that's a wonderful idea, except how do I do it, exactly?”

“How'd you do it last time?”

“Last time, I was floating in and out of my body, like a yo-yo. And one time I just stayed.”

“Why don't you try to lie down and get back into your body?”

“No. This is the first time my feet haven’t hurt in the last month.” I glanced down and turned my legs around, my unease replaced with exhilaration. My body was fine and I was free of it.

“See? My ankles aren’t swollen.”

“Samantha!” Dodge growled.

“Besides, I can finally get into the little red negligee you like so much.” I concentrated on my attire. In the past I could change my hair, both style and color, as well as my clothes. This time there was a little glitch.

Dodge’s eyebrows went up and he stared directly at my belly. Then he smiled. “It doesn’t quite work the same.”

I glanced down. The red dress was stretched tight over my oversized belly. As I frowned, I said, “Well, I’ve resembled a gigantic beached whale for at least a month. Do they come in red?”

He shook his head and then his eyes narrowed with concern. “Samantha, is the baby with you or still with your body?”

I put my hands on my stomach and felt her kick. “Part of her is definitely with me, she just kicked the hell out of my bladder. I need to pee.”

“This cannot be good for *him*, Samantha. It’s one matter complication for you to be in two places, but it can’t be good for him.”

“*She* goes where I go,” I told him. We disagreed on the sex of our child. The doctor knew, but Dodge and I wanted to be surprised.

“*He* needs to stay in one place.”

“Why?” I popped the last bite of ham into my mouth.

Dodge started to speak. then stopped. “And you can eat?”

I finished chewing the ham and shrugged. Previously, I always had to get inside another person to eat but I guess it was like touching things: if I didn’t think about it, I could do it. I looked at my stomach. “I wonder where the food goes?”

“I can’t believe we are having this conversation.” He grabbed his sweatpants and pulled them on. “I’m calling Sarah.”

“Your sister?”

“Yes, she’s a doctor.”

“That’s the sister who graduated top of her class from Harvard Medical School and then did her residency at John Hopkins and became a brilliant surgeon, only to throw it all away and go

back to school to become some kind of holistic doctor? So now she does what, cures appendicitis with a plant from the mountains of Tibet?"

"Samantha, she might be able to help us figure out how your jumps in and out of your body affect the baby. We can't exactly tell Dr. Sanction about it, now can we?"

"Dr. Sanction is the best obstetrician in the entire world. He flies in every other week from his office in New York to check on me. At \$50,000 a visit, we should be able to tell him anything."

I walked over to the bed. My body looked like it had suffered an allergic reaction to peanuts and turned into an elephant. I crossed my arms over my chest and stood firm. I would not get back into my body. I glanced down at my poor feet, broken nails and overgrown cuticles. I closed my eyes, ignored my husband and thought about beautifully manicured pink nails and soft well-trimmed cuticles. When I opened my eyes again, my feet looked beautiful.

"It's after midnight, Dodge. Can't this wait until the morning?" I said, finally satisfied with my feet.

He glanced at his watch. "Sarah's five hours away. It will be morning by the time she gets here."

"Dodge, this is ridiculous. Sarah's a busy woman, I'm sure she has better things to do than jump on an airplane and come here."

He pointed at my body. "Then get back in, Samantha."

"Fine," I went over and lay down into my body. Then I lifted my head up again, saw him frown, and said, "I'm in, I'm in!"

In the morning, everything was back to normal. My ankles were swollen, my back and legs ached, and I couldn't put on my own shoes. How nice!

His sister couldn't come for a few days as she was in China collecting some flower or herb. I mastered the ability to leave my body and even alter my body so I didn't look pregnant. Dodge went to work while I watched television and ate. He came home late every night and, maybe it was just pregnancy hormones, it was starting to piss me off.

Yesterday, Dr. Sanction, my obstetrician, came and announced I was pregnant with twins. No wonder I am as big as an elephant.

Being pregnant sucks! And being pregnant with twins is worse. I keep a vigilant lookout for that inner peace and outer glow that is supposed to come with pregnancy. What a crock!

I'm big enough to be a sumo wrestler; I have back spasms, my arms and legs are numb most of the time and I've developed carpal tunnel in one hand. I've never typed anything in my entire life – in school, I paid other people to do my typing. Worst of all, I haven't seen my feet in a month.

On the bright side, I can get out of my body – which is cool.

This morning, I stood on the master bedroom's bathroom floor, admired my feet and sighed, "Ah, there you are. I've missed you." Then I frowned and changed the toe color back to pink. "That's better."

"Samantha!" Dodge bellowed for the fifth time this morning.

I never saw myself married to a cop. I saw myself arrested by several, and probably even bribing a few of them, but not married to one.

"Samantha, get back in your body!" Dodge growled.

I glanced back. He stood by the bed, which my body was tucked into, and glowered at me. I threw him a seductive look and said, "You didn't seem to mind last night, Dodge."

He placed his hands on his hips and took a deep breath.

I went back to add little flower designs on my big toes. Dodge and I don't sleep in the same room anymore. Not since about the fifth month of my pregnancy when I started to snore like a herd of stampeding rhinos. Last night, I slipped out of my body and into his bed. It was all *I love you, Samantha, you're so beautiful*, and all the other gushy words people say to each other in the throes of passion. It wasn't more than three minutes later, while I basked in a multiple orgasm afterglow, when he started his rhetoric to get me back in my body. The man's a hypocrite.

"Samantha, would you please get back in your body?" Dodge pleaded.

I sighed in resignation. It's the same old predictable routine – he yells, then begs, and I give in because I'm tired of the monologue. Most days I can't tell whether I hate or love the man – the hormonal changes of pregnancy suck, too.

"Samantha, you don't know how this affects the twins, please get back in your body," Dodge begged, but it was more like a whine.

I rolled my eyes and said, "Thing 1 and Thing 2 are fine as currently they think my spine is a trampoline!"

"Stop calling them that." Dodge grimaced.

"But they are just like the little creatures in the Dr. Seuss book."

“No, they are beautiful little babies.”

I cocked my eyebrows at him. “You *were* there last week when we viewed that 4-D imaging, right?”

“Yes.”

“Then, I rest my case. And another thing, I hate the names Rachel and Edward.”

Dodge put his head in his hands.

Dodge and I have been debating baby names since the first day I found out I was pregnant and then expanded our discussions when we learned about the twins, a boy and a girl.

“Rachel sounds like she will be a little princess and I’m the only one who gets to be a princess around here and Edward sounds like he’s gay. It’s not because I will mind if he swings that way, I will love him no matter what he wants to be or do in his life and we are in the right city, but why strap him with a name where people will just *assume* he’s gay. And if not, they’ll think he’s named after a vampire from that movie trilogy they redid last year. Rachel and Edward are out. We may just have to wait until Thing 1 and Thing 2 are born before we give them names.” I changed my nail color to red. It matched my mood.

Dodge lifted his head and said, “It would be nice to have some names chosen before the wonderful event.”

“Ha!” I scoffed. “You mean when two watermelons are ripped from my body through an opening the size of an olive! It doesn’t sound wonderful to me – it sounds excruciatingly painful.”

“Samantha, you’re scheduled for a C-section,” Dodge reminded me.

“Oh, yeah, Dr. Sanction will take a huge knife, slice open my belly and pull out the watermelons. I don’t know why I keep forgetting that glorious fact!”

Dodge looked at my body on the bed and then glared at me.

“Fine!” I threw my hands in the air and got back into my body. The man was a buzz kill! I sat up and said, “Happy now?”

Dodge came over and kissed me gently on the lips. “Yes, thank you. I need a shower and then I’ll fix you breakfast.” He strolled out of my bedroom.

He knew the way to my heart was through my stomach, especially these days, but maybe I’ll surprise him and suggest a picnic at the beach for lunch today. It has been a long time since we sat on the shore and listened to the waves. Maybe we could go to the little island I own in the

Caribbean. I love being rich. No, there's no way he'll let me fly. The man has read every article on the dos and don'ts of pregnancy. Maybe we could just go to Golden Gate Park and listen to the waves. I always feel calmer at the beach.

While Dodge showered and got ready for work, I fixed breakfast – lobster eggs Benedict, roasted red potatoes, and fruit. I love my Auto Chef machine – just dial, push a few buttons, and whatever you're craving appears. Yum! It was invented in 2032 and now, almost ten years later, it has been improved to such a level and reduced in price enough that everyone uses one and very few people cook in their homes anymore. Why bother when you can push a button and get whatever you wanted? Of course you need to load it with the food you thought you'd want but mine was an advanced unit with more settings and more capacity than the average Auto Chef in most homes. A company loads it with all the different types of meat, vegetables, fruit, juices, sodas, and probably other foods I don't even think about. I've never asked for something it hasn't supplied.

Dodge came into the kitchen, kissed me gently on the cheek, and sat down. "Thanks for fixing me breakfast, Samantha. What's the occasion?"

"Can't a woman fix her husband breakfast before he goes off to work?"

"Yes, but since this is the first time in a year that you've done it, it makes me wonder if you have an ulterior motive."

"Well, now that you mention it, can you take some time off of work?"

"No, I've only been back a couple of months and I'm right in the middle of a homicide investigation." Dodge spooned some of the eggs into his mouth.

"Is it the same one you've been on since we got home from our honeymoon?"

"No, I solved that case a long time ago. I caught a new case a few nights ago. A homicide down by the pier and I still can't figure out the who, what, where, or why on this case." He put another bite into his mouth.

"If you don't solve it in the first forty-eight hours, you probably won't find the killer."

"You watch too much television, Samantha."

"What else can I do?" I shrugged and started on my own food.

"I'm sure you'll find something." He stood and kissed me on top of my head. "Don't wait dinner for me, Samantha. I'll probably be late again."

"That's the fourth time this week. Marriage to a cop is a pain in the ass."

He smiled, wrapped his arms around me, and pulled me as close as he could, given the enormous beach ball I carried around. "I love you and I'll see you tonight."

"Yeah, I love you too."

Then he put both hands on my stomach and said, "Keep your mom out of trouble, will you kids?"

"Our kids like being in trouble," I said, just as the babies kicked his hands.

He smiled, kissed my belly and walked out of our kitchen. I sighed loudly in hopes he would turn around, but a minute later I heard the front door close. I frowned, then continued with my breakfast.

As I scraped the last of the lobster Benedict into my mouth, the phone rang.

"Hello?" I said.

"Hi, Samantha. It's Dexter. Is Dodge still there?"

"No, you just missed him; he's already left for work." Dexter O'Brian had been Dodge's partner for ten years before I lured him away from police work and put him in charge of security for me. He opened up a security company and now has so many clients that he's constantly hiring new operatives.

"It's always an early start for a homicide detective with the SFPD."

"Of course." I sighed. "What's new with you and Jessica? How's business?"

"I love the security field. I've got more clients than I can handle alone, so I had to double my employees. Jess is great, growing bigger and bigger every day and she loves working with me."

"That would be keeping an eye on your wandering eyes?"

"Yeah, well, that too." Dexter chuckled.

"What did you need Dodge for? Will you ask *him* to quit his job and join you?"

"I already tried, but Dodge loves police work. I needed to ask his opinion on a new security system I might invest in."

"Well, he's left already and will be late tonight, *again*. Why don't you try him at the station?"

"Oh no. Every time I call, I get his new partner."

"Dodge has a new partner?" This was news to me. As far as I knew, he worked alone.

Silence.

“Dexter? Are you there?” My stomach tightened as a wave of anxiety rolled through me. Dodge never mentioned a new partner. Why?

“Yes,” Dexter stuttered, then rushed to say, “Just ask Dodge to call me.”

“Oh no, who’s his new partner?” Irritation replaced anxiety as a revelation dawned on me as to why Dodge might not have mentioned his new partner.

“Detective Pederson.”

“Male or female?”

“I don’t know. I’ve only talked to the person on the phone a few times.”

There is always a way around men, I smiled to myself, then said, “Okay. Is Jessica there?”

“Yeah, she’s across the breakfast table from me enjoying her *sixth* waffle.”

“Hand her the phone.”

“Why?” Dexter’s voice lowered with just a hint of suspicion.

“I want to talk about my swollen ankles and painful legs.” I sighed, for dramatic effect.

“Pregnant women talk? Yuck! Here she is.”

“Hey, Samantha. How’s it going?”

“I’m big as a house, tired, cranky, and haven’t seen my feet in a month. But that’s not important. When did Dodge get a new partner and do you know *anything* about this new partner?”

Then I heard her say, “Dex, I need to go into the kitchen. Samantha wants to know about my prenatal vitamins.”

A moment later, Jessica said, “He didn’t tell you about his new partner?”

“No.”

“His new *female* partner,” Jessica emphasized the word in a way that immediately got my hackles up.

“No, do you know her?”

“Yes, Eve worked with my unit in the DEA after a couple of years undercover with vice. I hated her on so many different levels. She’s taller than you by an inch or so, blonde, built like a goddess, black belt in karate, and a crack shot.”

“Oh great, the perfect woman for any cop.”

“You don’t have anything to worry about, Samantha. Dodge loves you.”

“And there’s so much more of me to love these days,” I laughed.

“Yeah, well, that I understand,” she laughed too. “I hear the weather’s been hot in the city?”

“Yeah, can you believe it? Usually I wear a parka every day and I’ve been in a tank top for two weeks. I love the heat, but the newspapers and most of the city people liken it to hell.”

Jessica laughed. “The heat brings out the crazy, too. I bet Dodge has been swamped.”

“Oh yeah, I barely see the man. I’ve eaten more dinners by myself in the last two weeks than I’ve done in the last two months.”

“That’s marriage to a cop,” Jessica sighed.

Jessica and I spent the next few minutes commiserating over our current aches, pains, bloated ankles, and food cravings.

All the discussion about food reminded me I hadn’t eaten for a few minutes, so I ordered Italian from the Auto Chef machine for my mid-morning snack. Next I watched two soap operas and an episode of *Law and Order*. It’s incredible the show has been on forty years and is still going strong. They’ve changed casts ten times, but everyone still watches it. Then I got Thai food for lunch, watched a court program, and then went into the bedroom to take a nap. Another sensational day at the Benson household.

Sleep eluded me since there wasn’t a single position that was comfortable anymore. I also kept imagining Dodge next to his beautiful new partner. Finally I gave up and went into the kitchen in search of something. Ice cream perhaps?

After the construction and consumption of a huge banana split, I decided to try to nap again. I lay down but couldn’t sleep. Maybe I should make a cup of tea to help me relax and go to sleep. I got up and started out of the bedroom.

My steps were lighter. A quick glance back told me my body was still in the bed. I didn’t want to wake myself up since I was finally resting so peacefully. What should I do now? The alarm clock on the nightstand said four-thirty. More food? Another television program? A smile slid across my face as I decided to go down to the station and see Dodge and check out his new partner for myself.

I walked through the front door and into the elevator. It’s nice that I finally mastered the ability to touch objects or I would have to walk down five flights of stairs to get to the street level. I never liked floating through buildings. Sometimes you saw the most awful events. People can be so cruel to each other and I just didn’t need to add depression to my pregnant emotional state. A few minutes later, I was out in the sunlight and the San Francisco downtown landscape

with its uniquely designed buildings, hustling pedestrians, and groves of taxis and limos. I liked the fact that they banned personal vehicles from the downtown area after the quake of 2030. I always traveled by limo, which eliminated most of the bottlenecked traffic so common to a downtown area.

When I was in Las Vegas helping Dodge with a murder investigation and still thought I was a ghost, I was able to will myself between the warehouse where Marge, another SFPD inspector, was held prisoner, to Treasure Island where Matthew, a religious serial killer, waited for Dodge. Could I do that now? Could I just will myself to the station? I closed my eyes and thought of the station, first the street it was on and then the front door. Nothing happened. Maybe I needed to think of a person and then I could go where the person was. I didn't want Dodge to know I was out and about, so I decided to travel the old-fashioned way.

I knew a cable car would be along in a few minutes. It's so nice the system was expanded after the private vehicle ban. Two minutes later, I stepped onto a cable car. I transferred twice, but soon enough I stood in front of the downtown police station.

Dodge's car, a vintage 1974 Dodge Dart Sport, wasn't parked in the lot next to the station. He owned a replica when we first met but a restored original was my wedding gift to him. According to Dodge, it was the car he was conceived in and his dad's pride and joy. He had many fond memories of working on the car with his dad. I envied him. My memories of my own dad were mostly of watching him leave for a business trip or vacation with my mom.

I would just go in, see if his new partner was around, then get back home. It sounded easy enough, especially if Dodge wasn't around to catch me. I don't know who was more surprised, Dodge or me, the first time he saw me. Before him, only mental patients, babies, and drunks could see me. At first I thought it was because he had taken a few shots of tequila, but even after he sobered up, he could still see me.

I walked through the front door and into the main hallway where each door was labeled. The third door on the right was home to the Investigation Unit. I slowly stuck my head through the door and looked around. The room had been totally remodeled since the first day I met Dodge and followed him to the station. Then, it was a single huge room with rows of desks set up in pairs. Now the room was broken up into compartments by gray cubicle walls. I stepped into the room and checked the first cubicle. In the center, two desks faced each other. White boards covered two of the walls and a bulletin board was mounted on the third. This cubicle was a mess.

Papers were strewn everywhere and you couldn't see the top of either desk. This certainly wasn't Dodge's cubicle. He was a neat freak.

I checked out several more cubicles and finally found Dodge's. It was immaculate. Sitting at one of the desks was a woman who was everything Jessica said and maybe even a little bit more. It must be Eve. Her muscular arms were well defined and her high cheekbones, sultry brown eyes, and tanned skin made me add gorgeous, sexy, and athletic to her list of attributes. She wore black slacks and a white blouse. A black tailored blazer hung on the back of her chair.

"I know it, Patty." she sighed into the phone.

As she listened to the other person on the phone, she doodled on a piece of scratch paper. I got closer.

"No." She shook her head. "He's not here."

Then she laughed.

"Gorgeous doesn't even begin to describe the man with his tight ass and bulging muscles. Sometimes we're so close to each other I want to reach out and..." she smiled and continued, "you know." Then she laughed again.

She had better not be talking about Dodge. My stomach tightened, which was quite a feat since it was back in our apartment.

"No, I haven't met her. I hear she's not bad looking, very rich, and spoiled rotten."

Adrenaline spiked up my spine as anger flushed my mind. "I am not!" I screamed, though she couldn't hear me.

"Yeah, they live on the top floor of the Mark's building. It's one of only a few high structures in the city since *someone* got special permission to ignore the four-story ordinance they enacted after all the tall buildings collapsed during the quake. The wife owns the entire top floor. I guess she didn't like his tiny apartment."

I liked his apartment. We just needed a bigger place, with the babies' imminent arrival and my stuff just wouldn't have fit in his apartment.

"No, tonight is an early night. Dodge is already gone. He needed to pick up his sister at the airport and wanted to surprise his wife by arriving home at a decent hour for a change. We've been on the job late every night for the last two weeks. This heat is driving the crazies wilder and the mandatory overtime is a bitch."

What? Oh no, Sarah and Dodge are at our apartment with my body. Crap! I needed to rush home but I thought I'd take a moment with Dodge's new partner first. I reached and tipped her coffee cup.

“Ah!” She jumped up. “I'll have to call you back, Patty. I just tipped over my coffee into my lap.”

Now, I needed to get home. How much trouble could I be in?