

A woman with dark hair, wearing a red dress, is shown from the chest up. She is looking over her right shoulder towards the camera. The background is a soft, out-of-focus blue and white light. The text is overlaid on the image.

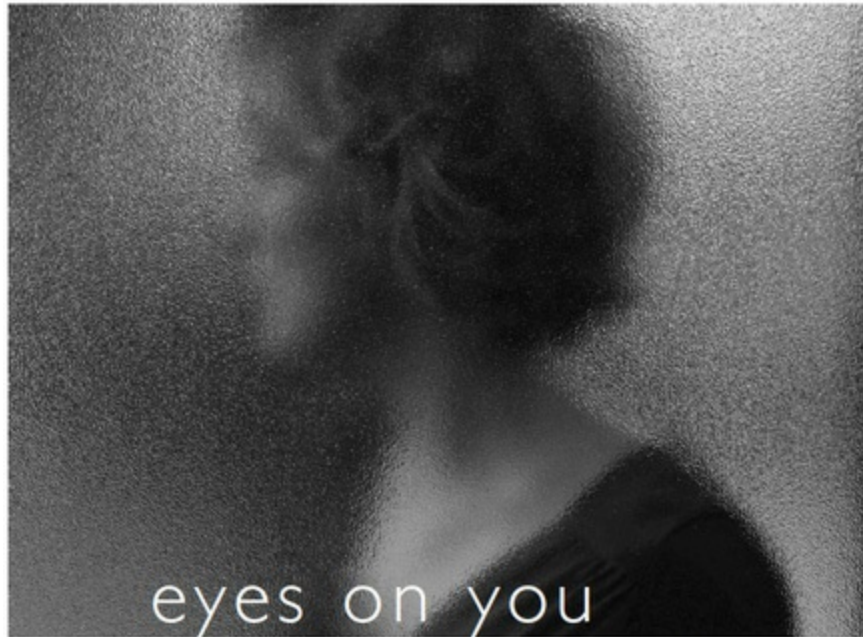
A NOVEL OF SUSPENSE

eyes on you

KATE

WHITE

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF THE SIXES



eyes on you

A NOVEL OF SUSPENSE

KATE WHITE



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# **dedication**

*To Jody Gaylin, Amy Archer, and Lori Stone*

*Thank you, Thank you, Thank you*

# contents

Dedication

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

Chapter 13

Chapter 14

Chapter 15

Chapter 16

Chapter 17

Chapter 18

Chapter 19

Chapter 20

Chapter 21

Chapter 22

Chapter 23

Chapter 24

Chapter 25

Chapter 26

Chapter 27

Chapter 28

Chapter 29

Acknowledgments

About the Author

Also by Kate White

Credits

Copyright

About the Publisher

## chapter 1

The shoes had made a nasty dent in my paycheck, but I wasn't sorry I'd splurged. They were Chanel, black-textured with a peep toe and a gold zipper up the back, really more of a booty than a stiletto. And not what you'd ever call "Fuck me" shoes—there was nothing about them that would make a guy want to bed you, unless he was the type who liked a razor-sharp heel at his throat. These were what you wore on your feet when you needed armor, when the night would include a few foes half-hidden among the friends and fans. They were the kind of footwear that said you could damn well take care of yourself.

"Fuck *you*" shoes, I thought. That's what they were. And I knew I might need them tonight. Because in TV there were always people who wished the worst for you.

As soon as I stepped off the elevator onto Bettina's floor, I could tell her apartment was packed. The din drove its way through the door, a babble of voices punctuated by ice clinking in glasses and bursts of laughter. Bettina had told me not to show until six-thirty ("The guest of honor must make an *entrance*"), and I was one minute ahead of that. I didn't want to seem all eager-beavery, but I also couldn't stand waiting any longer. I was about to be feted for the book I'd written, and I wanted to savor every second, especially because just two years ago, a night like tonight would have been preposterous to imagine.

The penthouse door swung open presto-like before I could even touch it. There was a guy right inside, wearing a collared black shirt, black pants, and gleaming, super-pointy black shoes. He smiled, beckoning me in. A twentysomething girl stood next to him, poured into a tight black dress and holding a clipboard. Big smile from her, too, as I stepped inside. The white walls of the entrance gallery popped with edgy modern art.

"Welcome, Ms. Trainer," the guy said, obviously recognizing me. "I'll let

Ms. Lane know you're here.”

“That’s okay, I’ll find her,” I said. I wanted a few moments to take everything in and *relish* it all.

I moved down the hall, inching by a cluster of people I didn’t recognize, and emerged into the enormous living room, nearly jammed with well-dressed guests. I’d been to Bettina’s apartment a couple of times when I’d consulted for her, but always during daylight hours—for offsite breakfast meetings and once a luncheon we’d put together for a group of key celebrity publicists.

Though I knew the place was a jaw-dropper, with floor-to-ceiling windows facing the lower Hudson, I wasn’t prepared for the magical twilight tableau in front of me. Hundreds of lights sparkled from buildings on the New Jersey side of the river, and inside, where every possible surface of the columned loft-style room was dotted with white votive candles. The air smelled of vanilla and some exotic fruit—maybe mango. Manhattan meets Madagascar, I thought. Just the kind of magic touch Bettina would concoct.

Pretty quickly, I started to pick out familiar faces—the major players from my book publisher; staffers from Bettina’s website; colleagues from the new cable show I was cohosting; my TV and book agents; and fortunately, a few gossip columnists, whom I was counting on to create hype for the book.

I recognized more than a few boldface names, people Bettina had obviously coaxed or strong-armed into coming out on a Sunday night in summer. As expected, there were a few foes also, including Mina Garvin, the TV critic who’d bludgeoned the show its first week on the air. But so what? I had the shoes for it.

I swung my gaze around the room, searching for my cousin’s daughter, Maddy, who’d been working as my intern the past few months. This party wasn’t meant for friends or relatives, but I’d asked Maddy to come in case I needed assistance. There was no sign of her, but to the far right, near a bar twinkling with glasses, I picked out Carter Brooks, my coanchor on *The Pulse*, holding court with the president of the network and a couple of other honchos. At six-three, Carter towered over the other men.

Off to the left, I noticed Vicky Cruz, aka “Cruz Missile,” on the move through the crowd, her short red bob punctuating the room like the head of a giant kitchen match. Within a few seconds, she’d maneuvered her way into

the all-male circle. She was known as a ballbuster, and she practically ruled the network as the host of its highest-rated show, yet in social settings with powerful men, she preferred to play the pussycat. I didn't like her show, and based on my limited contact so far, I didn't like *her*, but her success blew me away.

Simultaneously, several people spotted me and smiled, but before anyone had a chance to approach, Bettina zoomed over in my direction, parting the crowd like a speedboat through water. She was wearing a plum-colored dress with lips to match.

"Hello, darling," Bettina said, scratching her lacquered hair against each of my cheeks as she air-kissed me. "You look fabulous."

I liked Bettina, and I admired her fiercely—she'd built a monster Web empire, made a bloody fortune, and paid me nicely for consulting on how to turbocharge her celebrity coverage—but I also knew to keep my guard up around her. She made me think of a stray husky a college friend had adopted. He'd adored that dog, spent endless hours running and hiking with her, but refused to let her sleep in the same room with him. "Not with *those* eyes and teeth," he'd said. "I'm sure she's part wolf."

"Everything is amazing, Bettina," I said. "I can't believe you lured all these people out tonight."

"The key is for you to totally enjoy yourself," she said. "Tonight is all about *you*."

I flashed a smile, knowing, not ungratefully, that Bettina's comment was part bullshit. She had her sonar continually set for excuses to entertain, to bring together powerful and influential people in a mix that hummed, sizzled, throbbed, and sometimes burst into flames. But I was delighted to be her excuse tonight. "I intend to totally luxuriate in the evening," I said.

"Why don't you mingle for a little while, darling? Sign books. Share some of those secrets you wrote about. And then, around seven-fifteen, I'll make the toast."

"Perfect."

Bettina snapped her fingers at a passing waiter, snatched a glass of white wine from the tray for me, and then motored off, parting the crowd again.

I indulged in a sip of wine, set to mingle. Tom, the executive producer of my show, squeezed through the crowd to offer congratulations, as did my

book editor. At one point, I felt like I was being watched, and I let my eyes wander. Mina Garvin was staring at me, but she quickly looked away. It probably galled her that after a rough start five months ago, our show was now killing it in the ratings. Though she'd been right about how lame we were in the early weeks, her review had been especially mean—and *personal*, as if I'd hooked up with her husband or kicked her puppy in the head. Some people might have wondered why she'd been invited. Bettina once told me that her secret sauce for a good party included a few haters in the mix.

Someone squeezed my arm. It was Ann Carny, the PR director for the network. We'd become friends about four or five years ago, while working at another network, and she'd been a rock for me when my life had gone to hell. Now that we were ensconced once again at the same company, it had become easier for us to stay in touch.

"Hey there," I said, taking in her pale blue dress. "You look terrific."

Ann favored subdued styles, and the effect was always polished, elegant.

"Ditto," she said. "And what an amazing night. You must be so thrilled."

"I am. I can't believe the spread Bettina's put on."

"I don't mean just the party. You seem to own the world these days." Ann turned her head and pointed with her chin. At her direction, my eyes found their way to a huge shimmering canvas of irregular stripes in orange and black and red. Displayed on the rustic table beneath the painting were dozens of copies of my book, *The 7 Secrets Women Keep*. The front cover was bold and graphic; the back featured a huge photo of me in a tight red dress.

"Displaying them beneath that Sean Scully painting was a good idea," I said. "It will keep my ego in check."

"Oh, come on. Your book's great, and you should let your ego run wild tonight," Ann said. "You're even entitled to *gloat*."

"Mostly, I just feel relieved. To be back on track again. Thanks, of course, in no small part to you."

"Sorry I can't do a celebratory meal with you later. I've had this dinner on the books for ages, and I'll have to split in a sec."

"No worries. Maddy's going to grab a bite with me, if I can find her. I haven't had time to be much of a mentor, so maybe I can play catch-up tonight."

"Speaking of egos running wild, here comes your coanchor."

I smiled in greeting as Carter approached me, conscious that there might be a few people checking us out right then. One of the factors that had made the show successful so far was the on-air rapport between the two of us. With Carter, that didn't involve much heavy lifting. At forty-one, he was still the quintessential bad boy—charming, at ease in his skin, and great-looking, with deep blue eyes, slicked-back brown hair, and the kind of full, sensuous mouth that bad boys seemed to have an unfair market on. And off-set he looked even better: no make-up or product gleam to the hair.

Because of our rapport, there'd already been a few unfounded rumors in the press linking us romantically, and Ann, in her work role, advised us to discourage them. It was okay for people to *wonder* if we were getting horizontal, but God forbid we were actually doing so.

“Congratulations, Robin,” he said. “Do I get an autographed copy of the book tonight?”

“Of course,” I said. “Though should I just sign my name? If I make it out to you, you won't be able to regift it.”

Carter smiled. “Okay, so I accidentally gave someone a watch that said Lionsgate Pictures on the face. You ever gonna let me forget it?”

“I guess I'll have to wait until Christmas and see what you give me.”

“Switches for being such a wiseass. Ann, however, is a different story.” He glanced toward her and grinned. “I know it's only August, but I've already been perusing the Tiffany website with her in mind.”

“Carter, I do spin all day long,” Ann said dryly. “I don't need any from you. So tell me, have you read Robin's book yet?”

“Actually, I have,” he said. “Robin gave me an advance-reader copy.”

“Oh, come on, Carter,” I said. He'd been hyping the book during the past few shows, but I doubted he'd done anything more than skim it. “Don't tease.”

“I'm being serious. I finished it last night, and I thought it was terrific. Very smart.” As he spoke, his eyes seemed to hold mine an extra beat.

“Thanks,” I said. His comment had pleased me more than it should have. “I appreciate that.”

“Of course, what I *should* have done is employ some of the wisdom from it.”