

SO
PRETTY
IT
HURTS

a Bailey Weggins mystery

KATE
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New York Times Bestselling Author of *The Sixes*

So Pretty It Hurts

A Bailey Weggins Mystery

Kate White



HARPER

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Dedication

To John Q. Holbrook, fabulous father-in-law

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Chapter 1

An old geezer of a reporter I used to work with once said that I had a rotten habit of biting off my nose to spite my face. An ex-boyfriend told me the same thing. And you know what? It's true. There've been more than a few times when I've tossed back a gift or stormed off in a huff, and on one occasion I jumped out of a car in the rain and walked home alone, ruining the hottest shoes I ever owned. But I've rarely regretted it. The satisfaction I've felt from making the big defiant gesture—and seeing the stupefied expression on the other person's face—has generally been worth the price.

Soaked shoes are one thing, though, and a corpse is something else entirely. During a frigid week in early December, I bit off my nose to spite my face because of something the new guy in my life, Beau Regan, did. And I ended up in a big fat mess that involved all sorts of nasty things: a suspicious death, requests for kinky sex, my ass on the line at work, and a showdown with a killer who wanted to make sure I couldn't tell what I knew. In the end I decided I'd have to behave more rationally when my knickers were in a twist. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

The trouble started the week after Thanksgiving. Beau and I had been dating exclusively for about two and a half months, seeing each other a few times a week. Over dinner that Friday night Beau announced—out of the blue—that he needed to leave the next day for Sedona, Arizona, and would spend the next eight or so days there, shooting extra footage for his new documentary film. Apparently some people who hadn't been available before were suddenly available now, or something or other.

But Beau's announcement had bugged me. It turned out that he'd known for over a week that he needed to go but had only shared the news at the last possible moment. Why? I'd wondered. To me Beau had always seemed slightly mysterious and elusive, and just when I'd convinced myself that this was simply a perception created by those dark Heathcliffian eyes and longish brown hair, he was telling me that he had to head off on some vague-sounding trip, suggesting it wasn't perception after all.

I didn't come right out and say I was annoyed, but he could tell, I'm sure, by my attitude. Of course, that wasn't the only reason I was testy as December rolled around. I'm a true crime writer, and in addition to my part-time gig covering celebrity crime for the Manhattan-based tabloid magazine *Buzz*, I'd been trying to hawk my recent book, a collection of articles I'd written called *Bad Men and Wicked Women*. The small publisher had put practically zilch into promotion and marketing, and my book was currently something like number 29,478 on Amazon—when I had the nerve to look. Failure always turns me into a grump.

Beau called me as soon as he arrived in Sedona, and then called or texted every day after that. Things were friendly but a little clunky. The week without him seemed to drag by, and I realized how much I had come to love his company—both in bed and out. Please, I thought. Don't tell me I've fallen for someone who doesn't want to jump in with both feet just at a point when *I* do.

On the Thursday morning before the Sunday Beau was due back, he sent

me an unexpected text: “may finish early and b bk sat. will let u know.”

The message should have warmed the cockles of my heart—and trust me, the thought of falling onto a mattress with him one night sooner than planned made my cheeks flush. And yet as I hurried toward the subway stop at Astor Place on my way to *Buzz*, I could feel my overall annoyance starting to swell. It was the last line that really bugged me. *will let u know*. So I should just hold open my Saturday night in case he made it back to town? Maybe I was wrong, but to me that sounded like a guy who didn’t like to be pinned down himself, yet wanted to be sure *I* was.

I was still in a pissy mood when I arrived at *Buzz*. The place that morning seemed surprisingly quiet. Though the final closing day at *Buzz* is Monday, the phones tend to ring like mad on Thursday. That’s the day the issue hits the newsstands, and Hollywood publicists love to call and scream in defense of any clients they feel we’ve maligned. Phones weren’t ringing, and that wasn’t a good sound. At *Buzz*, if you’re not pissing off Hollywood publicists, you’re not doing your job.

“Oh God, Bailey, are those the new Prada riding boots?” Leo asked me as I pulled out my desk chair in the large open bullpen area. Leo’s a photo editor, but there isn’t enough room for him in the overstuffed art department, so he was bumped to a workstation right behind me and my office bff, Jessie Pendergrass, a senior staff writer. Leo spends most of his day scanning through paparazzi photos on his computer for shots of celebs looking blubbery, blotto, badly dressed, or like they’ve suddenly got a bun in the oven.

“Yeah, in my dreams,” I said.

“I thought maybe you got a big royalty check and splurged,” Leo said, rubbing his hand over his shaved head.

“No check yet, but I’m sure one is due any day now,” I replied. “Apparently I just got torpedoed by *Decorative Napkin Folding for Beginners* on Amazon.”

“You seem grouchy,” Jessie said. She’d just set down the phone and was scrutinizing me closely with her amber-colored eyes.

“Sorry—I’m just a little frazzled. Does anyone want coffee?”

They both declined, and I headed back to the kitchenette, where I filled up my mug. There were five or six people congregated there, arguing about the ending of a new movie; most I didn’t even recognize. Not only was the staff at *Buzz* huge, but because of the pressure and late hours, it turned over faster than you could say “Jen’s Latest Heartache.”

When I arrived back at my desk, Jessie wheeled her chair over to me.

“Bailey, I’ve got a brilliant idea,” she said, her eyes sparkling. “I know Beau is out of town till Sunday so I bet you don’t have anything planned for the weekend. How would you like to spend a weekend with me at a gorgeous house in the country?”

“You’ve definitely got my attention,” I said, not bothering to point out that Beau might be coming back Saturday.

“Remember that record producer I told you I met a few weeks ago—Scott Cohen? He called yesterday and asked if I wanted to come to his weekend place—along with a friend if I wanted.”

“Is it in the Hamptons?”

“No, it’s north of the city someplace. We can hike if we want or just sit by the fire and drink hot toddies. There’ll even be a masseuse on hand.”

“Wow, that sounds so much better than treating all my boots with water repellent,” I said. “But if this guy is after you, why would he want me tagging along?”

“He’s invited a whole group of people—you know, a house party. It’ll actually be less awkward for me if you come. Besides,” she added, grinning, “we can take your Jeep.”

“You sure about this?”

“Yeah, it’ll be fun. Please say yes.”

“God, I’d love to,” I said. I meant it. It *did* sound fun. But as I smiled back