

FICTION / Crime

When dying to date Mr. Right leads to finding Mr. Wrong—it's deadly.

Relationship expert Kristina Truly has a proven track record for dating the wrong men. However, her highly publicized romantic failures don't stop her fans from attending her Finding Mr. Right, Not Mr. Perfect seminars and reading her bestselling relationship self-help books.

After three women are murdered, FBI Agent, Detective Jakes discovers one common link—they've all attended Kristina's workshops. His challenge is to figure out if Kristina is involved in the murders, or if she's going to be the next victim. One thing is for sure: he's got his hands full keeping tabs on the sexy as hell Kristina Truly while searching for a deranged serial killer.

Kristina is shocked to learn she's deeply entangled in Detective Jakes's criminal investigation. When the brutal killings become personal, Kristina feels somehow responsible. She must help stop the killer or end her career of helping people find true love. Either way, Kristina is in the middle of serious trouble.



Sharmyn McGraw is a native of California and resides in Orange County. She's an internationally recognized patient advocate for those affected by pituitary tumors. After her own brain surgery for Cushing's disease, she found her passion for writing. Growing up with dyslexia, she feared writing so much as a Post-it note; but after her surgery, her passion to help others was bigger than her fear of writing. Sharmyn contributed to television and health journals to shed light on the often-misunderstood pituitary gland. After twenty years in remission, she's having a blast writing about her other passion: fun, sassy mysteries featuring strong, passionate characters.
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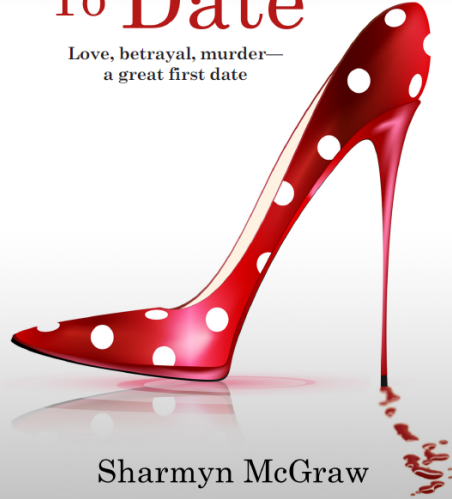
THE DYING SERIES
BOOK ONE

Dying to Date

Sharmyn McGraw

Dying To Date

Love, betrayal, murder—
a great first date



Sharmyn McGraw

THE DYING SERIES | BOOK ONE

Please enjoy chapter one!

Book one is coming soon.

You'll be the first to hear when Dying To Date is available in eBook and in print.

Dying To Date, The Dying Series, Book One
by Sharmyn McGraw

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CHAPTER ONE

*F*ocus. *You're not naked, Kristina.* It's not like she'd ever gone in public without clothes on—well, with one exception: underwear—but who hasn't left a boyfriend's house with their sexy lace panties strategically tucked under his pillow at least once? Kristina took a deep inhale through her nose and then a cleansing exhale through her mouth. Calmer now, she secured her battery pack to the back of her waistband, clipped the portable headset behind her ear, and adjusted the microphone alongside her cheek.

She tucked her well-pressed blouse into her buttery soft, black leather skirt. Listening for her musical cue, Kristina waited outside of the conference room while her event manager hyped the crowd.

Kristina closed her eyes to visualize the room filled with loving friends. A rush of adrenalin pulsed through her veins. *Relax. Stay focused. Don't go there.* A news headline from the past flashed before her eyes in giant black letters: “Scorned Lover Releases Sex Videos with Relationship Guru, Kristina Truly.” The brazen image dangled in Kristina's head. *Breathe in through my nose; hold it ... Breathe out through my mouth.*

Two years ago, she had stopped seeing her therapist and started “seeing” her therapist, Randolph Joxhel, PsyD.

Unbeknownst to Kristina, her new boyfriend must have videotaped their fiery sexcapades in his office with a hidden video camera. During her fourth therapy session, they took their client-therapist relationship to a sexual relationship. However, their six-week romance ended after the sexy shrink turned dangerous. He paid Kristina an uninvited visit late one night, through her downstairs window. Asleep upstairs in her bedroom, she woke to noises moving up her creaky staircase. She scrambled for her Taser gun in the nightstand next to her bed. Heavy footsteps slapped down the hallway toward her bedroom. Aimed and loaded, she waited with a steady trigger finger. A tall, thin figure entered the doorway. The prowler flipped the light switch on the wall near the door and yelled, "Surprise." That was an understatement. Utter fear morphed into fucking furious when she recognized who the intruder was. Dressed in some kinky bondage garb, Randolph stood there wearing a corseted, black leather bustier and a gold metal chastity belt with his penis locked in a cage. Through a clenched jaw, and a myriad of choice words, Kristina made it clear they were through. Wanting to spare him public humiliation, she agreed not to involve the police. Randolph returned the favor by hacking her social media.

The next morning, her phone blew up with text messages and phone calls from friends and the news media. Randolph posted their sex videos on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter but protected his own identity by not showing his face attached to the male body entangled with hers. Shining at all angles, Kristina was the star of the show. In less than twenty-four

hours, the sex tapes went viral across the Internet. The Feds froze his assets and opened an investigation, which led to finding out a lot more about the sick doctor. Having his medical license revoked was the least of his problems. But with the unpredictable magic of social media, Kristina's popularity skyrocketed. Until the videos hit the net, she was an unknown life coach and facilitated small motivational workshops in a makeshift banquet room at the local YMCA. It was a slow time for celebrity breakups and political scandals, so all news outlets had a heyday with her story.

Overnight, she'd become a relationship sensation and shocked everyone who knew her, herself included. In the past forty-two years, Kristina never picked the right man. Yet now, in the era of trendy social apps and fake news, she'd become a highly sought-after relationship expert. Kristina admitted the newfound fame and the large cash settlement her ex-boyfriend paid out lessened the sting of her highly publicized humiliation. Her attorney acted fast to get the videos off the World Wide Web, but as everyone knows, nothing is ever off the Internet.

However, with her *Finding True Love* relationship self-help books on the *New York Times* bestseller list and her workshops selling out months in advance, she'd tried putting all that chaos behind her to focus on her booming career. But every time Kristina took the stage, like today, a wave of embarrassment heated up her spine. The fact was, like it or not, most of the audience had seen her naked, having sex on a couch with Dr. Sicko in the middle of the day in High Definition.

Kristina pulled herself together and continued through her mental checklist. *Damn. Where are the workbooks?* She said out loud to no one. Doing a quick about-face, she speed-walked to the hotel's foyer.

"Angel. Angel." In a loud whisper, Kristina beckoned her business partner/assistant/best friend. Without acknowledgment, Angel continued talking on her cell phone.

"I'll be home around seven-thirty tonight, and you better not be asleep in that recliner with the television babysitting your children. I mean it, Jermaine."

Kristina hushed her voice, "Angel, please. I need your help." She hiked her skirt up and bent down on her hands and knees to have a look under the eight-foot-long registration table. She needed to find the participant workbooks on *Committing to a Healthier, Loving Relationship* that was part of her motivational symposium. She crawled under the table.

"Baby, put Daddy back on the phone. Jermaine, I gotta get back to work. You heard what I said." Angel hit the disconnect button on her cell phone four times with her index finger as if hitting it harder each time got her point across that much better.

With a sharp tone, Angel informed Kristina, "I was having an important discussion with my husband about his parenting responsibilities."

"Discussion . . . argument . . . sounded the same to me." Kristina slid a heavy box out from under the table.

Angel snatched the box from the floor, slamming it down on top of the table above Kristina's already pounding head.

“Well, you’re not married. You don’t know what it takes to make a living, raise three kids, and hope you don’t kill their father when he leaves the milk carton on the damn kitchen counter overnight to get sour.”

Focused on finding what she needed, Kristina shouted from under the table, “Are these my workbooks?”

Angel rolled her eyes and shook her head, irritated. “No. Kristina, stop. The people from the conference next door asked to store their boxes while they get their table set up.” Angel dropped another box on the tabletop.

“Ouch. Angel, it feels like you’re slamming the boxes on my head.” Kristina climbed out from under the table. She yanked her skirt back down over her thighs and took a deep breath. “Where are my workbooks? We need them. Pronto.” Kristina snapped her fingers toward Angel. In the same nanosecond, she regretted it. Since the second grade, Angel and Kristina had been best friends, and Angel had zero patience when Kristina barked orders like a prima donna.

Wide-eyed, Angel stared at Kristina, who stood there with a very, *Oh Shit, I’m so sorry*, look on her face. With no urgency, Angel placed her cell phone in the side pouch of her purse. She faced Kristina with pitched eyebrows. “Yesterday, I stuffed two hundred of your *Happy Relationships*, *Happy Life* workbooks into the new swag tote bags we spent a bloody fortune on to have printed for this conference. Everyone got a bag at check-in.” Angel doubled down with two quick snaps of her fingers. “KT, what the hell’s going on with you lately? The past few days, you’ve really lost your focus. We talked

about this. It'll save time on large conferences if everyone gets their workshop materials when they check in at registration instead of passing them out during the first breakout session. Girl, get your diva ass on stage. As always, I've taken care of everything." Angel pretended to clear her throat. She swiped her thumb across Kristina's cheek. Her tone softened, "You smeared your make-up, crawling under that stupid table."

Kristina tapped herself on the forehead with her palm, "Holy shit, shit, shit." She took a deep breath and smoothed her hands across the front of her skirt. "Sorry Angel, I forgot about the new swag and the workbooks. My head isn't on straight. I can't stop thinking about my dad. Aunt Mimi says he's only got a few days left. I'm having a hard time wrapping my head around him being gone. I mean, gone-gone, dead, gone, forever. I know it won't change anything; he's unable to talk." Kristina babbled on, "He will never say he's sorry, and even if he did, what good would it do now? He's had thirty-five years, right? Why would lying on his deathbed change anything? But whatever; we'll see. I'm not sure if I'll go see him in the hospital or not." She tried to sort out the betrayal issues she had with her dad over the past three decades. This was all a moot point. He'd be dead soon.

Angel understood Kristina better than anyone else. Angel grew up in a stable home with a devoted father, unlike Kristina. "You're a hell of a person, girlfriend. I'd let his sorry-ass rot—" Angel stopped herself. She didn't need to finish what she started to say. They both knew how Angel felt about Kristina's father, and he deserved it. Angel smiled, putting

both hands on Kristina's shoulders, pointing her toward the long corridor. "Go. Before the first break, I'll have the merch table set up and a table ready for your book signing. Oh wait, Jaclyn Renzo volunteered to help today and hasn't shown up yet. If she doesn't show, we'll be short-staffed. This is the second time Jaclyn's pulled a no show. Don't worry. I'll ask one of our regulars to step in. Get going. Knock 'em dead, KT."

Hoofing it down the hall, Kristina looked back over her shoulder toward Angel. "Jaclyn Renzo?" Kristina halted abruptly. "She's missing. This morning someone put a flier on my car window with her picture on it. Shit, I knew her name sounded familiar. I think she lives in my neighborhood. Wait—wasn't it Jaclyn whose ex-husband or boyfriend showed up at a workshop, and she gave him the slip out a back door?"

Angel glanced at her watch, "Yeah, that was Jaclyn. What the hell? She's missing? It was her ex-husband who showed up." Angel pointed her finger toward the conference room doors. "You need to get on stage—now. I'll make a call to the police station and let them know what we saw in case it helps find her."

"Thank you, Angel. Love you, girlfriend." Kristina puckered her mouth with a kiss in the air and hurried down the hall to the conference room. She waited behind the double doors. The tempo of the music climaxed, and she listened for her event manager's introduction.

"Let's welcome internationally best-selling author and world-renowned relationship expert, the beautiful, articulate, charismatic, and always in fashion, Ms. Kristina Truly."

Pushing the double doors wide open, she entered the room. The crowd stood to cheer. Smiling and waving like a pageant queen, Kristina took the stage.

The audience, after almost endless applause, finally silenced. With the enthusiasm of a high school cheerleader, Kristina addressed the group, “Ladies and gentlemen, thank you all for being here at my, *Perfect Relationships are For Perfect People—They Don’t Exist*, workshop.” The crowd cheered again for a moment, then allowed Kristina to continue. “I’m really excited to be here to help all of you learn to (Kristina put her hand to her ear, waiting for them to say it with her) ‘Turn Your Pain into Passion—One Relationship at a Time.’”

“If you’re dying to have a better relationship with your partner or meet the right mate, you will leave this workshop feeling self-empowered and ready to commit to a healthier, loving relationship with Mr. or Ms. Right—Not Mr. or Ms. Perfect.”

Kristina heard loud chuckles coming from the audience, reassuring her that people liked what she had to say. “I’m confident what you learn here today will give you the tools to have the relationships of your dreams. I believe there is a Mr. or Ms. Right at the end of a very long rope of Mr. or Ms. Wrongs. But most of us have had to suffer a few rope burns along the way in our past relationships. So, let’s commit to not only finding the one but to finding the right one because the knot at the end of the rope may be the one you tie with Mr. or Ms. ‘I Do Love You.’”

The audience roared in agreement again, and Kristina graciously waited until the clapping stopped and then dug into the full-day marathon she'd created. She based the hours of material covered in her workshops and bestselling books on her years in college to earn her Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology, but what her students liked best was her teaching by example. Kristina shared openly about her fucked-up ability to pick the right men. She connected with her audience because she shared the ugly side of unhealthy relationships. She preached the mantra, *I Own My Shit; What Part Do I Play in My Messed-Up Life?* Kristina shared the hard lessons learned through her failures over the years while searching for her own healthier, loving relationships.

Helping hundreds of people find “the One—the Right One, felt to Kristina like getting to snuggle up with George Clooney while enjoying a frozen ice-cream Snickers bar after hours of heart pumping, tongue tangling, slippery sweat-dripping sex. It left her completely exhausted but wanting more.