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Shopaholic to the Rescue: A Novel

By Sophie Kinsella



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#1 *New York Times* bestselling author Sophie Kinsella returns with another laugh-out-loud Becky Brandon (née Bloomwood) adventure: a hilarious road trip through the American West to Las Vegas.

Becky is on a major rescue mission through the American West to Las Vegas! Her father has vanished from Los Angeles on a mysterious quest with the husband of Becky's best friend, Suze. Becky's mum is hysterical; Suze is flat-out desperate. Worse, Becky must tolerate an enemy along for the ride, who she's convinced is up to no good.

Determined to get to the bottom of why her dad has disappeared, help Suze, contain the dreaded Alicia, and reunite her fractured family, Becky knows that she must marshal all her trademark ingenuity. The result: her most outrageous and daring plan yet!

But just when her family needs her more than ever, can Becky pull it off?

Praise for Shopaholic to the Rescue

"Full of gags, sparkling dialogue and beautifully drawn characters . . . It's a real treat to be reunited with the eminently loveable, incredibly ditzy and fiercely loyal Shopaholic protagonist Becky Brandon (née Bloomwood)."—*Daily Mail*

"Will Bex and best friend Suze ever make up? Will Becky's old nemesis, banker Derek Smeath, finish his memoir? Why can't our beloved Shopaholic seem to spend any money, even on a \$2.50 pencil? . . . This is escapism that will make you giggle out loud."—*USA Today*

"Readers can't help but be delighted. Kinsella never once loses Becky's voice and heart, which is one of the joys of the Shopaholic series."—*Publishers Weekly*

"Full of Becky's outrageous ideas, including a heist à la *Ocean's Eleven*, this novel does not disappoint. . . . Kinsella adds a mystery and twists and turns at every corner in this latest work while maintaining Becky's signature voice."—*Library Journal*

From the Hardcover edition.

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Editorial Review

Review

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About the Author

Sophie Kinsella is the author of the bestselling Shopaholic series, as well as the novels *Can You Keep A Secret?, The Undomestic Goddess, Remember Me?, Twenties Girl, I've Got Your Number,* and *Wedding Night.* She lives in England.

From the Hardcover edition.

Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. From: dsmeath@locostinternet.com To: Brandon, Rebecca Subject: A "request"

Dear Mrs. Brandon, It has been a long time since I saw you last. I hope you and your family are flourishing.

As for myself, I am enjoying a life of retirement but find my mind often casting back fondly to episodes from my professional life at Endwich Bank. I have therefore decided to embark upon an "autobiography" or "memoir," provisionally entitled: *Good and Bad Debts: The Ups and Downs of a Patient (and Not So Patient!) Fulham Bank Manager.*

I have written two chapters already, which were well received by members of my local horticultural club; several present even expressed the opinion: "They should put it on TV!" Well, I don't know about that!!

I might say, Mrs. Brandon, that you were always one of my more "colorful" customers and had a "unique" approach to your finances. (I heartily hope and believe that you have mended your ways with maturity.) We

crossed swords many a time, but I trust we reached some sort of "*entente cordiale*" by the time of my retirement?

I therefore wonder if I might interview you for my book at a time convenient to yourself? I await your reply with pleasure.

Yours sincerely, Derek Smeath Bank Manager (Retd.)

From: dsmeath@locostinternet.com To: Brandon, Rebecca Subject: Re: Re: A "request"

Dear Mrs. Brandon,

I write in disappointment. I approached you in good faith, as a fellow professional, or even, dare I say, friend. I hoped to be treated as "such."

If you do not wish to be interviewed for my "memoir," then that is your choice. However, I am saddened that you felt the need to concoct an elaborate lie. Clearly this ridiculous, convoluted story about "racing after your father towards Las Vegas" to "uncover some mystery" and make sure "poor Tarkie isn't being brainwashed" is entirely fictitious.

How many times, Mrs. Brandon, have I held missives from you in which you have claimed to have "broken your leg," "suffered from glandular fever," or told me that your (imaginary) dog has died? I had hoped that as a mature, married mother, you might have grown up a little. However, I find myself sadly disappointed.

Yours sincerely, Derek Smeath

From: dsmeath@locostinternet.com To: Brandon, Rebecca Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: A "request"

Dear Mrs. Brandon,

To say I was astonished by your most recent email would be an understatement. Thank you very much for the series of photographs.

I can indeed see that you are standing on the edge of a desert. I see the RV that you are pointing at and the close-up of the map of California. I also observe your friend Lady Cleath-Stuart in one picture, although whether it is "totally obvious from her tortured expression that her husband has gone missing" is not for me to say.

May I please ask you to clarify: Your father has gone missing *and* so has your friend's husband? Both at once?

Yours sincerely, Derek Smeath

From: dsmeath@locostinternet.com To: Brandon, Rebecca Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: A "request"

Dear Mrs. Brandon,

My goodness, what a story! Your email was a little garbled, if I may say—-would these be the correct facts?

—Your father came to visit you in Los Angeles because he discovered some news regarding an old friend, Brent, whom he had not seen for many years.

—He then disappeared on a mission, leaving only a note in which he referred to "putting something right." —He has enlisted the help of Lord Cleath-Stuart ("Tarkie"), who has been through a difficult time lately and is in a "vulnerable state."

-He has also co--opted a chap named "Bryce." (Strange names they have in California.)

-Now you are following the three to Las Vegas in the fear that Bryce is a nefarious character who may wish to extract money from Lord Cleath-Stuart.

In answer to your query, I'm afraid I do not have any "blinding insights" with which to help you, nor did anything similar ever happen while I was at the bank. Although we did once have a rather "shady" client who attempted to deposit a bin bag full of £20 notes, whereupon I phoned the financial authorities. I will be recounting that "tale" in my book, believe me!!

I wish you every success in tracking down the missing three, and if I can be of any help whatsoever, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely, Derek Smeath

ONE

"OK," says Luke calmly. "Don't panic."

Don't panic? *Luke* is saying "don't panic"? No. Noooo. This is all wrong. My husband never says "Don't panic." If he's saying "Don't panic," then what he really means is: *There's every good reason to panic*.

God, now I'm panicking.

Lights are flashing and the police siren is still sounding. All I can think are wild random thoughts like, *Do handcuffs hurt*? and *Who shall I call from my jail cell*? and *Are the jumpsuits* all *orange*?

A policeman is heading toward our hired Class C twenty-six-foot motor home. (Blue gingham drapes, flowered upholstery, six beds, although "bed" is an exaggeration—try "six skinny mattresses plonked on planks of wood.") He's one of those cool-looking American policemen with mirror shades and a tan, and he's very scary. My heart starts to thump and I automatically start searching around for a hiding place.

OK, maybe this is a slight overreaction. But I've always been nervous around policemen, ever since I smuggled six pairs of dollies' shoes out of Hamleys, at age five, and a policeman came up to me and boomed, "What have you got there, young lady?" and I nearly jumped out of my skin. He was admiring my helium balloon, it turned out.

(We sent the dollies' shoes back in an envelope after Mum and Dad found them, with a letter of apology, which I wrote myself. And then Hamleys wrote back and said, *Don't worry*, very nicely. I think that's the first time I realized that writing a letter is actually a very good way to get yourself out of a tricky situation.)

"Luke!" I mutter urgently. "Quick. Are we supposed to bribe them? How much cash have we got?"

"Becky," says Luke patiently, "I said, don't panic. There'll be a perfectly good reason why they've pulled us over."

"Should we all get out?" says Suze.

"I say we stay in the vehicle," says Janice, sounding edgy. "I say we act perfectly normal, as though we've got nothing to hide."

"We have got nothing to hide," says Alicia, sounding exasperated. "Everyone needs to relax."

"They've got guns!" says Mum wildly, peering out of the window. "Guns, Janice!"

"Jane, please calm down!" says Luke. "I'll go and talk to them."

He gets out of the RV, and the rest of us look around at one another anxiously. I'm traveling with my best friend, Suze; my very much *un*-best friend, Alicia; my daughter, Minnie; my mum; and *her* best friend, Janice. We're on our way to Las Vegas from L.A., and already we've argued about the air-conditioning, the seating arrangements, and whether Janice should be allowed to play Celtic pipe music to calm her nerves. (Answer: no. Five votes to one.) It's a tad fraught, this road trip, and we've only been going for two hours. And now this.

I watch as the cop approaches Luke and starts talking.

"Doggie!" says Minnie, pointing out of the window. "Big, big, big doggie."

A second cop has come up to Luke, with an intimidating-looking police dog. It's a German shepherd and it's sniffing around Luke's feet. Suddenly it looks up at the RV and barks.

"Oh God!" Janice emits an anguished cry. "I knew it! It's the narcotics squad! They're going to sniff me out!"

"*What*?" I turn to stare at her. Janice is a middle-aged lady who likes flower arranging and doing people's makeup in lurid shades of peach. What does she mean, sniff her out?

"I'm sorry to have to tell you, everybody .?.?" She gulps dramatically. "But I have illicit drugs about my person."

For a moment, nobody moves. My brain is refusing to compute these two elements. Illicit drugs? Janice?

"Drugs!" Mum exclaims. "Janice, what are you talking about?"

"For jet lag," Janice moans. "My doctor was so unhelpful, I had to resort to the Internet. Annabel at the bridge club gave me the website, but it had a disclaimer: *May be prohibited in certain countries*. And now that dog will sniff them out and we'll get hauled in for questioning—"

She breaks off at the sound of frenzied barking. I have to admit, the police dog seems quite keen on coming over to the RV. It's pulling on its leash and yelping, and the policeman keeps looking down at it in irritation.

"You bought *prohibited drugs*?" Suze explodes. "Why would you do that?"

"Janice, you're going to jeopardize the whole trip!" Mum sounds apoplectic. "How could you bring Class A drugs to America?"

"I'm sure they're not Class A," I say, but Mum and Janice are too hysterical to listen.

"Get rid of them!" Mum is saying shrilly. "Now!"

"Here they are." Janice takes two white packets out of her bag, her hands fumbling. "I never would have brought them if I'd known—"

"Well, what shall we do with them?" demands Mum.

"Everyone swallow one blister pack," says Janice, pulling them out of the boxes in agitation. "That's the only thing we can do."

"Are you nuts?" retorts Suze furiously. "I'm not swallowing unlicensed tablets from the Internet!"

"Janice, you have to dispose of them," says Mum. "Get out and scatter them by the side of the road. I'll distract the police. No, we'll *all* distract the police. Everybody out of the RV. Now."

"The police will notice!" wails Janice.

"No, the police won't notice," says Mum firmly. "Do you hear me, Janice? The police *won't* notice. Not if you're quick."

She opens the door of the RV and we all pile out into the already blazing hot day. We're parked by the side of the freeway, with scratchy, scrubby desert stretching away on either side, as far as you can see.

"Go on!" Mum hisses to Janice.

As Janice picks her way over the dry ground, Mum bustles up to the policemen, Suze and Alicia in tow.

"Jane!" says Luke, looking taken aback to see her by his side. "It wasn't necessary for you to get out." He shoots me a glance that says *What the hell are you doing?* and I shrug helplessly back.

"Good morning, officer," Mum says, addressing the first policeman. "I'm sure my son-in-law has explained the situation. My husband has gone missing on a secret life-or-death mission."

"It's not necessarily life or death." I feel the need to clarify.

Every time Mum uses the phrase "life or death," I'm certain her blood pressure goes up. I keep trying to soothe her, but I'm not sure she wants to be soothed.

"He's in the company of Lord Cleath-Stuart," Mum continues, "and this is Lady Cleath--Stuart. They live in Letherby Hall, one of the top stately homes in England," she adds proudly.

"That's irrelevant!" says Suze.

One of the cops takes off his sunglasses to survey Suze.

"Like Downton Abbey? My wife is nuts for that show."

"Oh, Letherby is far better than Downton," says Mum. "You should visit."

Out of the corner of my eye I notice Janice, standing in the desert in her aqua floral two--piece dress, madly scattering pills behind a giant cactus. She could hardly be less discreet. But luckily the policemen are distracted by Mum, who is now telling them about Dad's note.

"He left it on his pillow!" she's saying indignantly. "A 'little trip,' he's calling it. What kind of married man just ups and leaves on a 'little trip'?"

"Officers." Luke has been trying to get a word in. "Thank you for informing me about the taillight. Perhaps we could carry on with our journey now?"

There's a short silence as the cops look consideringly at each other.

"Don't panic," says Minnie, looking up from where she's been playing with her favorite dolly, Speaky. She beams up at one of the policemen. "Don't panic."

"Sure thing." He beams back at her. "Cute kid. What's your name, honey?"

"The police *won't* notice," replies Minnie conversationally, and at once there's a prickly silence. My stomach clenches tight and I don't dare glance at Suze.

Meanwhile, the smile on the cop's face has frozen. "I'm sorry, what did you say?" he asks Minnie. "Notice what, sweetheart?"

"Nothing!" I say shrilly. "We've been watching TV; you know what children are like. .?.?."

"There we are!" Janice arrives by my side, breathless. "All done. Hello, officers, what can we do to help you?"

The two cops seem disconcerted to see yet another person joining the group.

"Ma'am, where've you been?" asks one.

"I was behind the cactus. Call of nature," Janice adds, clearly proud of her prepared answer.

"Don't you have facilities in the RV?" says the light-haired cop.

"Oh," says Janice, looking thrown. "Oh, goodness. I suppose we do." Her confident air melts away and her eyes dart about wildly. "Goodness. Um .?.?. well .?.?. in actual fact .?.?. I felt like a walk."

The dark-haired cop folds his arms. "A walk? A walk behind a cactus?"

"The police won't notice," says Minnie to Janice confidingly, and Janice jumps like a scalded cat.

"Minnie! Goodness, dear! Notice what? Ha-ha-ha!"

"Can't you shut that child up?" says Alicia in a furious undertone.

"It was a nature walk," Janice adds weakly. "I was admiring the cacti. Beautiful .?.?. um .?.?. prickles."

"Beautiful prickles"? Is that the best she could come up with? OK, I'm never going on a road trip with Janice again. She looks totally uncool and guilty. No wonder the cops seem suspicious. (I'll admit that Minnie hasn't exactly helped.)

The policemen are looking at each other meaningfully. Any minute now they're going to say they're bringing us in or calling the feds. I have to do something, quick. But what? Think, *think*... And then inspiration strikes.

"Officer!" I exclaim. "I'm so glad we've met, because I have a favor to ask. I have a young cousin who'd love to become a police officer, and he'd be so grateful for an internship. Could he contact you? You're Officer Kapinski.?.?." I get out my phone and start typing in the name, copying it off his badge. "Perhaps he could shadow you?"

"There are official channels, ma'am," says Officer Kapinski discouragingly. "Tell him to look on the website."

"Oh, but it's all about personal connections, isn't it?" I blink innocently at him. "Are you available tomorrow? We could meet after work. Yes! We'll be waiting for you outside the precinct." I take a step forward and Officer Kapinski backs away. "He's so talented and chatty. You'll love him. So we'll see you tomorrow, shall we? I'll bring croissants, shall I?"

Officer Kapinski looks utterly freaked out.

"You're good to go," he mutters, and turns on his heel. Within about thirty seconds, he, his colleague, and the dog are back in the police car and zooming off.

"Bravo, Becky!" applauds Luke.

"Well done, love!" chimes in Mum.

"That was close." Janice is trembling. "Too close. We need to be more careful."

"What is all this?" says Luke, baffled. "Why did you get out of the RV?"

"Janice is on the run from the narcs," I say, and almost want to giggle at his expression. "Look, I'll explain on the road. Let's get going."

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