

CHAPTER ONE

This was the worst Friday of my career. A beep from the computer reminded me of the meeting that marked the end of life as I knew it. My heart thumped wildly in my chest. A sense of dread enveloped me. The door to the conference room stood open. A cacophony arose from those inside. I sighed, then sucked in a long breath and strode inside with my head down. Colorful streamers and banners decorated the walls while balloon bouquets adorned eight tables. I wanted to hide from my friends and coworkers and walked like someone going to the gallows as I made my way to the center of the room. Smiles and laughter erupted around me. Friends smiled at me, but numbness kept me from responding. On a side table sat a giant cake covered with colorful icing flowers and the words “Happy Retirement, Kathleen” in bright red icing. My heart ached even more. The one bright spot came as I realized that these fifty people came to wish me well in the next chapter of my life. But then a rising fear overtook me, and panic made me think about escaping to the nearest exit. Will I ever feel useful again? Because right now, I feel like a failure. I disguised my feelings by pretending to smile back at Yvonne M. Morgan GYPSY FOR GOD 2 3 friends and coworkers. What does God have planned for my future? Yup, Kathleen Johnson, put out to pasture after almost thirty years of faithful service at Smith Accounting, Inc. Discarded like an old rag. My face flushed and my throat tightened at the injustice of the situation. I had planned to work until at least sixty-five, not fifty. But everything changed a few months ago. After years of climbing my way up the corporate ladder, I discovered the company placed more importance on saving money than remaining loyal to their long-term employees. The options came down to retiring or moving up north to Canada, far away from my family and friends here in Arlington, Texas. I had wrestled with this decision for days and lost lots of sleep over it, eventually choosing the unwelcome retirement, or maybe it chose me. But

now, the decision haunted me as thoughts ran wild in my mind. My work had brought meaning to my life. So now, where would I find my worth or purpose? The slow traffic on the way home on 1-20 south of the metroplex had given me too much time to think about my sad situation. Now, I couldn't wait to fall into my husband Sam's arms. Thank God for a husband who knows how to comfort me. My cat Rex greeted me at the door and the emptiness of the house echoed the emptiness of my soul. I rubbed Rex's head as he brushed against my leg and purred loudly. "Where's Sam?" I asked but got no reply. "I guess he's still at work." More dark thoughts popped into my mind. Sam and I are the same age, but his company values the wisdom that comes with age and years of faithful service. God hasn't forgotten him as he did me. He still can contribute to society. The ugly thoughts shifted. Am I too rigid in my routines and inflexible about trying anything new, as Sam so often tells me? So what if I expect everything planned out in my life and everything in its place? What's wrong with starting every day the same way, driving the same route, or stopping at the same local coffee shop? I appreciated how Courtney, the coffee shop morning employee, prepared my coffee— black with one sugar—and handed it to me when I walked through the door each morning. Will she wonder where I am come Monday? I walked down the hallway toward the kitchen, glancing into both bedrooms, the den, and the formal living room to check for Sam. My heart ached to feel his reassuring arms around me. I plopped into a kitchen chair and let my head rest on the table. Helping my clients audit their annual financial statements and following a regular morning routine gave me a sense of purpose. Now, my world crashed around me and left me reeling. I don't think I can live without my routine. A profound gloom washed over me afresh as I contemplated the challenges of finding a new daily routine. To say I'm a creature of habit is a considerable understatement. But after today, all that changes. Sam arrived home a short time later with a bouquet of flowers he

hoped would cheer me up. The bright yellow roses arranged with fresh baby's breath and dark green foliage brought a momentary smile. After thirty-one years of marriage, Sam understood how much I struggled with change. I slipped into the kitchen with the excuse of looking for a vase and to avoid answering the inevitable questions he would ask. But more than that, the painful answers I would have to give. When I reentered the living room, I found Sam perched on the dark brown leather couch with a huge smile. Yvonne M. Morgan GYPSY FOR GOD 4 5

"How was the retirement party?" he asked. "I enjoyed it. All the usual friends and coworkers looking for a free piece of cake attended," I said. "They served an Italian cream cake that tasted yummy. I brought a piece home for you." "Cake, yum. Hold on," he said, heading toward the fridge. "I think I'll try a bite now instead of waiting till after dinner." I giggled. After all our years together, he still made me laugh and smile. Even with his hair graying around the temples, my heart fluttered at the mere sight of him. I counted it as a blessing when I met him all those years ago at Dallas Community College north of the city. Sam had studied management and I accounting. After graduation, we moved into the same apartment complex to maximize our time together, my favorite thing. Marriage followed a year later, and then, we purchased this lovely ranch style home where we had lived ever since. However, my failings began to haunt me soon after marriage. After enduring several miscarriages, we stopped trying when we discovered my body was incapable of bearing children. Years of depression left me a shell of a human and tore at the fabric of our marriage. The bitter disappointment consumed me and forced me to search for a purpose besides motherhood when Sam refused to discuss adoption as a solution. I threw myself into my career instead and found a purpose there. I also used cats to fill the void of my empty uterus. The pitter-patter of their little paws allowed me to pretend that a herd of kids ran through the house. Eight cats over the last thirty years helped me to fill my maternal needs. I

loved them all, but they were poor substitutes. Sam reemerged from the kitchen and sat beside me. After wolfing down the entire piece of cake and dropping crumbs into his lap, he said, “Yum.” Sam’s arms folded around me then, and my smile faded as a tear unwillingly ran down my cheek. “What am I going to do with myself now?” I asked while he lovingly caressed my cheek. “You’ll figure something out, babe. For the next few days, take things easy. I think you need some time for yourself. Maybe you can reconnect with the person God intended you to be.” He ran a thumb over my wet cheek. “Once you do that, I know you’ll find some kind of new career that’ll be life-changing and rewarding.” I turned away. “It’ll all work out, just like that verse you have posted on the fridge.” Sam got up and returned a moment later with the sticky note on his fingertips. “Here it is, Romans 8:28; ‘And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.’” Then he added, “God has a plan. Just wait and see.” Does God have a plan for me? How can a retired, routine□obsessed, middle-aged lady have a purpose? Later, as I lay wide awake, I heard the grandfather clock in the hallway. Tick, tick, tick echoed through my mind. Each tick reminding me I had no purpose. Tick—unworthy. Tick—loser. Tick—irrelevant.