



Her Secret Husband (Secrets of Eden Book 4)

By Andrea Laurence

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Years ago, Heath Langston eloped with Julianne Eden. Their parents wouldn't have approved. So when the marriage remained unconsummated they went their separate ways without telling anyone what they'd done.

Now family turmoil forces Heath and Julianne back into the same town—into the same house. Heath has had enough of living a lie. It's time for Julianne to give him the divorce she's avoided for so long—or to fulfill the promise in her smoldering glances and finally become his wife in more than name only.

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HEIR TO SCANDAL

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Editorial Review

Review

"Heath Langston and Julianne Eden both find themselves rushing home when their foster father suffers a heart attack. Years ago, Heath and Julianne secretly eloped, but never consummated their marriage. Now living under the same roof, Heath wants Julianne to give him a divorce or finally become his wife -- and not just in name. Laurence does a good job wrapping up all of the loose ends involving the Secrets of Eden murder-mystery storyline with a shocking twist. The ending is especially sweet as it brings back past characters from the series." - 4 stars, RT Book Reviews

About the Author

Andrea Laurence is an award winning contemporary author who has been a lover of books and writing stories since she learned to read. She always dreamed of seeing her work in print and is thrilled to be able to share her books with the world. A dedicated West Coast girl transplanted into the Deep South, she's working on her own "happily ever after" with her boyfriend and five fur-babies. You can contact Andrea at her website: <http://www.andrealarence.com>.

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"Your dad's heart attack was pretty serious this time."

The doctor's words did little to make Heath Langston feel better about his foster father's condition. He stood outside Ken Eden's hospital room, listening to the doctor's prognosis. He felt helpless, which was not the way he liked it. He might be the youngest of the "Eden boys," but he owned his own advertising firm on Madison Avenue. He'd single-handedly developed one of the most successful ad campaigns of the last year. He was used to everyone, from his secretary to his business partner, looking to him to make decisions.

But this was serious stuff. Life and death. Not exactly his forte. Ken and Molly Eden's only biological child, Julianne, hadn't stopped crying since she arrived. Heath preferred to keep things light and he'd much rather see Julianne smile, but even he couldn't find anything to make a joke about right now.

The Edens' five children had rushed to their family farm in Cornwall, Connecticut, the moment they'd gotten the call about Ken's heart attack. Heath had gotten into his car and bolted from New York City, not knowing if his foster father would be alive by the time he got to the hospital. His biological parents had died in a car accident when he was only nine years old. He was a grown man now, the CEO of his own company, but he wasn't ready to face losing another parent.

Heath and Julianne were the last to arrive and were receiving the report the others had already heard.

"He's stable now, but we were lucky," the doctor continued. "That aspirin Molly gave him may have made all the difference."

Julianne's tiny figure stood in front of him. Despite the doctor's serious words, Heath couldn't keep his eyes from going to her. She took after Molly, being petite but powerful. Today, she looked even smaller than normal, with her shoulders hunched over and her head dipped down to focus her eyes on the floor. Her blond hair had been long and loose when she'd first arrived, but after sitting forever in the waiting room, she'd clipped it up into a messy twist. She shivered at the doctor's words and tried to snuggle deeper into her green cashmere sweater.

Heath put a reassuring hand on her shoulder. His brothers each had their fiancées to hold for support, but he and Julianne were both alone. His heart went out to her. He hated seeing his feisty, confident artist looking so broken. Although they'd grown up in the same house, she had never been a sister in his mind. She had been his best friend, his partner in crime, and for a short time, the love of his life.

Knowing they had each other in this dark moment made him feel better. Tonight, he hoped they could put their tumultuous past behind them and focus on what was more important. Since Julianne didn't pull away, she had to feel the same. Normally, she would give him a playful shove and artfully dodge the physical contact, but not today.

Instead, her body slumped against him for support, her back pressing into his chest. He rested his cheek against the gold strands of her hair and deeply breathed in the scent that was imprinted on his brain. She sighed, sending a tingle of awareness traveling along his spine. The sensation turned the doctor's voice into a muffled mutter in the distance. For a moment, there was only him and her. It wasn't the most appropriate of times, but he would revel in the contact.

Touching Julianne was a rare and precious experience. She had never been a very physically demonstrative person, unlike Molly, who hugged everyone she met, but she kept an even greater distance from Heath. No matter what had happened between them all those years ago and who was to blame, in a moment like this he regretted the loss of his best friend the most acutely.

"He's going to need open-heart surgery. After that, he'll have to stay in ICU a few days until we can move him to a regular room."

"How long until he'll be able to come home?" Julianne asked, making Heath feel guilty for where his mind had strayed. Even as they touched, she was focused on something more important than the two of them and their history together. It was enough for him to straighten up and put some distance between their bodies once again. He opted to focus on the doctor's answer instead.

The doctor frowned. "I don't like to set expectations on this kind of thing, but as I told the others, he's going to be with us a week at least. He might need to go into a rehab center for a while. Maybe he could be at home if there's a bed downstairs and a nurse could be brought in. After that, he's going to have to take it easy for a few months. No lifting, no climbing stairs. He won't be cutting down pine trees this Christmas, that's for sure."

That decided it. With everything else that was going on, Heath had already been thinking of taking a few months off to return to his foster parents' Christmas-tree farm. A body had been discovered on former family property last Christmas and it had recently been identified as Tommy Wilder, a foster child who had stayed briefly on the farm. Heath and the other Eden children knew that Tommy had been dead nearly sixteen years, but the police investigation was just now heating up.

Heath had been torn between wanting to keep up with every news story on television about Tommy and wishing he could just pretend the bully had never existed. Unfortunately, he knew well that ignoring issues wouldn't make them go away.

As much as he hated to admit it, it was time for Heath to come home and answer for what he'd done. It was just Ken and Molly on the farm now, and although they knew nothing about the truth behind Tommy's disappearance, they were having to deal with the police investigation on their own. According to his only biological brother, Xan-der, the stress of Sheriff Duke threatening to arrest Ken had put him into the hospital

today.

It was bad enough that one person was dead because of Heath's mistakes. He couldn't bear it if someone else, especially someone innocent like Ken, also fell victim.

The doctor disappeared and he and Julianne made their way back to the waiting room area, where the rest of the family was assembled. His three brothers and their fiancées were scattered around the room. Some were reading magazines, others were focused on their phones. All looked tired and anxious. "I'll be coming to stay at the farm until Dad is better," he announced to the group. "I can handle things."

"I know it's only the beginning of October, but Christmas will be here before you know it," his oldest foster brother, Wade, pointed out with a frown furrowing his brow. "The last quarter of the year is always a nightmare. You can't take all that on by yourself."

"What choice do we have? All of you are busy. My business partner can run Langston Hamilton for a few months without me. And I've got Owen," Heath added, referring to the Garden of Eden Christmas Tree Farm's oldest and most faithful employee. "He can help me with the details. When Christmas comes, I'll hire some of the high school and college boys to bag and haul trees."

"I'm coming home, too," Julianne announced.

The whole family turned to look at her. She'd been fairly quiet since she had arrived from the Hamptons, but only Heath seemed to realize the significance of her decision. She was volunteering to come home, even knowing that Heath would be there. While she visited the farm from time to time, it was very rare that the boys were there aside from Christmas celebrations. Volunteering to spend months with Heath was out of character for her, but she wasn't exactly in a good headspace.

Despite how small and fragile she looked, there was a sternness in her eyes. Unfortunately, Heath knew that look well. The hard glint of determination, like emeralds, had set into her gaze, and he knew she wouldn't be dissuaded from her decision. Once Julianne's mind was made up about something, there was no changing it.

Even without Heath there, her coming to the farm was a big deal. Julianne was a sculptor. Both her studio and her boutique gallery were in the Hamptons. It wasn't the kind of job where you could just pick up your twelve-hundred-pound kiln and work wherever you like.

"What about your big gallery show next year?" Heath said. "You can't afford to lose two or three months of work to come down here."

"I'm looking to set up a new studio anyway," she said.

Heath frowned. Julianne had a studio in her home. The home she shared with her boyfriend of the last year and a half. It was a personal record for her and everyone thought Danny might be a keeper. Looking for a new studio meant looking for a new place to live. And possibly a new relationship.

"Has something happened with you and Danny?" their brother Brody asked, saving Heath the trouble of nosing into her love life.

Julianne frowned at Brody, and then glanced around at her protective older brothers with dismay. She obviously didn't want to talk about this now, or ever. "Danny and I are no longer 'Danny and I.' He moved

out about a month ago. I needed a change of scenery, so I've sold the house and I'm looking for something new. There's no reason why I can't move back for a few months while Dad recuperates. I can help around the farm and work on my art pieces when we're closed. When Dad's feeling better, I'll look for a new place."

Heath and the other boys looked at her dubiously, which only made the color of irritation flush her pale, heart-shaped face. "What?" she said, her hands going to her hips.

"Why didn't you say anything about your breakup with Danny? And selling your house? You two were together a long time. That's a pretty big deal," Xander noted.

"Because," Julianne explained, "three of you guys have gotten engaged recently. It's bad enough that I'll be going stag to all of your weddings. I wasn't exactly looking forward to telling all of you that I've got yet another failed relationship under my belt. Apparently I'm doomed to be the old maid in the family."

"That's hardly possible, Jules," Heath said.

Julianne's cool, green gaze met his. "Point is," she continued, deliberately ignoring his words, "I'm able to come home and help, so I will."

Heath could tell by her tone that the discussion was over for now. Taking her cue, he turned to the rest of his siblings. "Visiting hours are about over, although you'll pay hell to get Mom from Dad's bedside. The rest of us probably need to say good-night and head back to the farm. It's been a long, stressful day."

They shuffled into Ken's hospital room, the dark, peaceful space ruined by the beep of Ken's heart monitor and the low rumble of the voices on his television. There was one light on over the bed, illuminating Ken's shape beneath the off-white blanket. He was nearly as pale as the sheets, but it was a big improvement over the blue-tinged hue his skin had taken on earlier. His light blond, nearly white hair was disheveled from constantly pulling out his oxygen tube and putting it over the top of his head like a pair of sunglasses. Molly had obviously forced it back into his nose recently.

She was sitting in a reclining chair beside him. It was the kind that extended into a bed and that was a good thing. Molly wasn't going anywhere tonight. Her normally cheery expression was still pasted onto her face, but that was more for Ken's benefit than anything. Heath could tell there wasn't much enthusiasm behind it. They were all struggling just to keep it together for Dad's sake.

Ken shifted his gaze from his favorite evening game show to the group of children huddled at his bedside. Heath realized they must look ridiculous standing there. Five rich, successful, powerful people moping at their father's hospital bed, unable to do anything to help. All their money combined couldn't buy Ken a new heart.

At least, not *legally*. Since they'd already done their fair share of dancing on the wrong side of the law and had enough police lurking around their property to prove it, they'd stick with the doctor's recommendations for now.

"There's not much happening here tonight," Ken said. He tried to cover the fact that speaking nearly winded him, but he had to bring his hand to his chest and take a deep breath before saying anything else. "You kids get on home and get some rest. I'll be here. I'm not going anywhere, anytime soon."

Julianne stepped to his side and scooped up his hand. She patted it gently, careful not to disturb his IV, and

leaned in to put a kiss on his cheek. "Good night, Daddy. I love you."

"I love you too, June-bug."

She quickly turned on her heel and moved to the back of the group so others could take their turns. She'd let the tears on her cheeks dry, but Heath could see more threatening. She was trying to hold them in and not upset Ken.

One by one, the rest of them said good-night and made their way out to the parking lot. The hospital was a good distance from Cornwall, so they merged onto the highway and made the long, dark drive back to their parents' farm.

Wade and Tori returned to their nearby home, but the rest of the family continued on to the farm. The boys each parked at the bunkhouse, leaving an impressive display of luxury vehicles out front. Heath was last, pulling his Porsche 911 Carrera in between Xander's Lexus SUV and Brody's Mercedes sedan.

Twenty-five years ago, the old barn had been converted into a guest house of sorts, where the foster children who came to live at the Garden of Eden would stay. It had two large bedrooms and baths upstairs and a large common room with a small kitchenette downstairs. It was filled with old, but sturdy furniture and all the comforts teenage boys needed. Heath was the youngest of the four boys who had come to the farm and stayed until adulthood. These days they spent their time in multimillion-dollar mansions and apartments, but this farm was their home and when they returned, the boys always stayed in the bunkhouse.

Heath watched Julianne pull her red Camaro convertible up closer to the main house. The old Federal-style home was beautiful and historic, but it didn't have enough space for a large crew of children. Ken and Molly had a bedroom, their daughter, Julianne, had a room and there was one guest room.

She stood on the porch, fumbling with her keys and looking lost. Heath didn't like that at all. Normally, Julianne was a woman who knew exactly what she wanted from life and how to get it. But tonight she looked anything but her normally spunky self. Nearly losing Ken right after things went south with Danny must have been more than she could take.

Heath grabbed his overnight bag from the trunk of his Porsche and followed the group into the bunkhouse. He set his duffel bag on the old, worn dining room table and looked around. The downstairs common room hadn't changed much since he'd moved in, aside from the new flat-screen television Xander had purchased during his recent stay.

There was a sense of comfort in being back home with his family. He imagined that wouldn't be the same for Julianne, who would be returning to an empty house. Heath might not be the person she'd choose to stay with her tonight, but he wasn't going to argue with her about it. He wasn't leaving her alone.

"Hey, guys," he said to his brothers and their fiancées as they settled in. "I think I'm going to sleep in the big house tonight. I don't like the idea of Jules being alone. Not after the day we've had."

Xander nodded and patted him on the shoulder. "That's a good idea. We'll see you in the morning."

Heath picked up his bag, stepped out and then jogged across the grass and gravel to the back door.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Robert Pinkerton:

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