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Every Breath You Take: A Novel

By Judith McNaught

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Unforgettable characters, sizzling romance, and riveting suspense: These are the trademarks of beloved author Judith McNaught. With millions of devoted fans and ten New York Times bestsellers to date, McNaught is a writer whose work just gets better with each new novel—and Every Breath You Take is the book readers have been waiting for. Returning to the lavish Chicago setting of her popular novel Paradise, and revisiting some of that book's characters as well, this story will captivate in inimitable Judith McNaught style.

High atop a snow-covered hill, the stately old Wyatt mansion is perched like a crown, its stone spires pointing upward, its stained glass windows glowing like colorful jewels. Such opulence means success and, surely, happiness. But on the eve of wealthy philanthropist Cecil Wyatt's eightieth birthday, all the money in the world won't bring back his missing grandson, William Wyatt. The only thing for certain: Foul play was involved.

The family, the police, the media—all have tried in vain to discover the young man's fate. Now suspicion has turned shockingly toward William's own half-brother, the rather distant and enigmatic Mitchell Wyatt.

Kate Donovan never dreamed that a chance romantic encounter on a tropical island paradise would tag her as a suspect in a high-society murder case. But after Kate tangles with the darkly charismatic Mitchell Wyatt, she finds herself cast in a shadow of guilt and mistrust. As the Chicago police tighten their net, it will take all of Kate's ingenuity to clear her name. With her calm, cool wit, and the help of a man who may or may not be a dangerous catch, Kate vows to claim the life and love she desires.

From the Hardcover edition.

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Editorial Review

From the Inside Flap

Unforgettable characters, sizzling romance, and riveting suspense: These are the trademarks of beloved author Judith McNaught. With millions of devoted fans and ten New York Times bestsellers to date, McNaught is a writer whose work just gets better with each new novel-and *Every Breath You Take* is the book readers have been waiting for. Returning to the lavish Chicago setting of her popular novel *Paradise*, and revisiting some of that book's characters as well, this story will captivate in inimitable Judith McNaught style.

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About the Author

Judith McNaught soared to stardom with her stunning bestseller *Whitney, My Love*. Since then she has gone on to win the hearts of millions of readers around the world with such breathtaking novels as *Double Standards*, *Tender Triumph*, *Once and Always*, and the New York Times bestsellers *Something Wonderful*, *A Kingdom of Dreams*, *Almost Heaven*, *Paradise*, *Perfect*, *Until You*, *Remember When*, *Simple Gifts*, *Night Whispers*, and *Someone to Watch Over Me*. She lives in Dallas, Texas.

From the Hardcover edition.

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Chapter One

High atop a snow-covered hill, the Wyatt mansion perched like a regal crown, its Gothic stone spires pointing skyward, its stained-glass windows glowing like jewels.

A mile away, limousines and luxury cars paraded in a slow stream toward a uniformed security guard posted at the gated entrance to the estate. As each vehicle reached him, the security guard checked the occupants' names off the guest list; then he issued a politely worded edict to the driver: "I'm sorry, because of the snowfall, Mr. Wyatt does not want any vehicles parked inside the gates this evening."

If a chauffeur was at the wheel, the guard stepped aside, allowing the chauffeur to turn into the drive, proceed through the gates, and deliver his passengers to the house before returning to the main road to park and wait.

If the vehicle's owner was at the wheel, the guard motioned him toward a line of shiny black Range Rovers parked up the hill at a cross street, wisps of exhaust curling from their tailpipes. "Please pull forward and leave your car with an attendant," the guard instructed. "You'll be shuttled up to the house."

However, as each new arrival soon discovered, that process was neither as simple nor as convenient as it sounded. Although there were plenty of helpful attendants and available Range Rovers waiting within sight, large snowbanks and parked cars had encroached on the winding residential lane so that it was almost impassably narrow in places, and the steady procession of slow-moving vehicles had churned four inches of unplowed snow from earlier that day into thick slush.

The whole ordeal was unnerving and annoying to every- one. . . . Everyone except Detectives Childress and MacNeil, who were in an unmarked Chevrolet that was backed into a driveway one hundred and fifty yards uphill from the entrance to the Wyatt estate. The two detectives were part of a handpicked team, formed earlier that day, assigned to keep Mitchell Wyatt under twenty-four-hour surveillance.

At eight pm, they had tailed him here, to Cecil Wyatt's estate, where he swerved around the security guard who was trying to wave him down, then turned into the private drive and disappeared from sight. Once Wyatt vanished, there was nothing for Childress and MacNeil to do but park and make a record of whom he was associating with. To facilitate that, Childress was observing the scene through a pair of night-vision binoculars, reporting license-plate numbers and miscellaneous information to MacNeil, who wrote it down in a notebook.

"We have a new contender approaching the starting line," Childress murmured as another pair of headlights reached the security guard at the gate. He read the vehicle's license plate aloud for MacNeil; then he described the vehicle and driver. "White Mercedes AMG, this year's model, or possibly last year's. Driver is a Caucasian male in his early sixties, passenger is a Caucasian female, early thirties, and she's snuggled up against her smiling sugar daddy."

When MacNeil didn't reply, Childress glanced at him and realized MacNeil's attention was focused on a pair of headlights slowly descending the hill from the right. "Must be someone who lives up here," Childress remarked. "And he's not only rich, he's curious," he added as the black Lincoln Town Car came to a full stop and cut off its headlights directly in front of the driveway where they were parked.

The back door opened, and a man in his late thirties wearing a dark overcoat got out. Childress rolled down his window, intending to make an excuse for their presence, but as the man paused and put his cell phone to his ear, Childress recognized him. "That's Gray Elliott. What's he doing out here?"

"He lives nearby. Maybe he's attending the party."

"Or maybe he wants to pitch in and do some surveillance with us," Childress joked, but there was admiration in his voice. After only one year in office as Cook County's state's attorney, Gray Elliott was a hero to the cops—a brilliant attorney who wasn't afraid to take on tough, risky cases. The fact that he was also a wealthy socialite who'd dedicated himself to public service rather than the pursuit of greater wealth added another facet to his heroic image.

MacNeil liked him for all of those reasons but MacNeil had always liked Gray—even when he had been a carefree, reckless teenager whom MacNeil had busted for several minor youthful offenses.

Elliott finished his phone call, walked over to the car, leaned down, and looked inside. "You must be

Childress,” he said by way of greeting; then he shifted his attention to MacNeil. “I’d like a word with you, Mac.”

MacNeil got out and joined him at the back of the car. The wind had died down, and the engine was running, pumping warm exhaust at their feet. “I asked that you be assigned to this case,” Gray told him, “because you headed the investigation into William Wyatt’s disappearance, and you’re familiar with all the players.”

“Not all of them,” Mac interrupted, unable to keep his curiosity in check. “I never heard of Mitchell Wyatt until today. Who the hell is he, and why are we watching him?”

“He’s William Wyatt’s half brother, and I believe he’s responsible for William’s disappearance.”

“His half brother?” MacNeil repeated, his forehead furrowing into a doubtful frown. “When William disappeared, I interviewed all his family members and all his friends. No one ever mentioned a half brother. In fact, when I interviewed Cecil Wyatt, the old man repeatedly told me how important it was that we find his only grandson, and bring William home to his wife and kid.”

“You were deliberately misled by an arrogant, devious old man who wasn’t ready to admit he had a grandson he’d never acknowledged. I’ve known the Wyatts my whole life, and I never knew William had a half brother. For that matter, neither did William until this past June.

“According to the story I was just told, William’s father, Edward, had an affair with his secretary when William was a couple years old and his mother was dying of cancer. The secretary got pregnant, and William’s mother died a few months later, but when the secretary pressed Edward to marry her as he’d promised, he stalled, then denied the baby was his. She retaliated by threatening to take the whole sordid tale to the Tribune.”

Elliott’s cell phone rang, and he paused to glance at the caller’s name; then he ignored the call and continued. “At the time, Cecil had big political plans for Edward, which a scandal would have destroyed, but allowing ‘a common little tart’ to marry into the family was unthinkable. Cecil tried to buy her off, but she wouldn’t budge about her child’s right to be legitimate, to be named Wyatt, and to be raised as a Wyatt. She hired a lawyer, and eventually a deal was struck: Edward would marry her shortly before the baby was due, and then divorce her immediately after the birth. She relinquished all rights to the baby, granting full custody to Cecil. Cecil, in turn, was obliged to see that the baby was raised ‘with all the benefits associated with Wyatt money and social connections,’ including the finest education, travel abroad, and so forth. She received a substantial sum of money on the condition that she never divulge a word about anything that had happened and never again have contact with any of the parties involved, including the baby.”

MacNeil turned the collar up on his jacket. The bottom half of his body was reasonably warm, but his ears were freezing. “Obviously, Cecil later changed his mind about the grandson,” he said, rubbing his hands together before he stuck them in his pockets.

“No, he adhered to the letter of the agreement but not the spirit. He’d agreed Mitchell would grow up ‘with all the benefits associated with Wyatt money and social connections,’ but Cecil never specifically agreed that the ‘social connections’ would be with the Wyatts themselves. A week after he was born, Cecil sent Mitchell to a family in Italy, along with a falsified birth certificate. When he was four or five, Cecil yanked him out of that family’s home and had him sent to an exclusive boarding school in France. Later, Mitchell was sent to prep school in Switzerland, and then on to Oxford.”

“Did the kid even know who he was, or who was paying for his fancy education?” MacNeil asked.

“The family he lived with in Italy told him what they’d been told, which was that he’d been abandoned as a newborn on a California doorstep and that his name was merely a combination of two names picked out of a phone book by a group of generous American benefactors who regularly put up the money to support and educate boys just like him. These supposed benefactors wished for nothing in return except the right to remain anonymous.”

“Jeez.” MacNeil shook his head.

“If that’s pity I hear, save it for someone who deserves it,” Elliott said sarcastically. “From all accounts, young Mitchell enjoyed his life and made the most of his opportunities. He was a natural athlete who excelled at sports, he went to the finest schools, and he mixed easily with kids from Europe’s leading families. After he graduated from college, he put his education, his good looks, and his acquired social contacts to excellent use, managing to make himself a load of money. He’s thirty-four now, and he runs companies based mostly in Europe. He has apartments in Rome, London, Paris, and New York.” Elliott paused to look at his watch, frowning as he tried to see its face in the dark. “Can you see the time on your watch?”

MacNeil pulled up his sleeve and glanced at the large glowing green numerals on his Timex. “Eight forty-five.”

“I have to go. I need to put in an appearance at Cecil’s party.”

“How did Wyatt end up right here, right now, after all this time?” MacNeil said quickly, trying to make optimal use of the remaining time.

“Seven months ago, in early June, William came across the documents in an old safe, and he was outraged at the treatment his poor half brother had received from his father and grandfather. He hired detectives, and when they located Mitchell Wyatt in London, William took his wife and his son and flew to London to introduce them in person and explain what had happened.”

“That was a nice thing to do.”

Elliott tipped his head back and looked at the sky. “Yes, it was,” he said in the carefully controlled voice of a man trying not to betray any emotion. “William was a thoroughly nice guy—the only male in his family for generations who wasn’t an egotistical sociopath.” Abruptly, he looked back at MacNeil and finished. “When William came back from London filled with glowing accounts of Mitchell’s amazing successes, Edward didn’t want anything to do with his long-lost son, but old Cecil was evidently impressed enough to ask for a meeting. The meeting took place in August, when Mitchell was supposedly here on business. And then, after William disappeared in November, Cecil asked Mitchell to come back to Chicago so they could get to know each other better. Ironically, the old man is now quite taken with his prodigal grandson—so much so that he’s asked him to be present tonight, for his eightieth birthday party. I have to get going,” he said, already starting toward his car.

MacNeil walked beside him. “You haven’t told me anything that explains why we’re keeping Mitchell Wyatt under surveillance.”

Elliott stopped abruptly, his expression tight, his voice cold and clipped. “Oh, did I leave that out?” he asked.

“Here are just two of the reasons: In September, one month after that first reunion between Cecil and Mitchell, Edward—William and Mitchell’s father—‘fell’ off his balcony and plunged thirty stories to his death. In November, William vanished. Coincidentally, according to U.S. passport and immigration records, Mitchell Wyatt entered the U.S. shortly before each event occurred and departed almost immediately afterward.”

When MacNeil’s eyes narrowed, Elliott said, “Now you’re getting part of the picture. Here’s more of it: Mitchell has been in Chicago for two weeks. He’s staying at William’s house, consoling William’s beautiful wife, and befriending William’s fourteen-year-old son.” Unable to keep the loathing from his voice, Elliott said, “Mitchell Wyatt is systematically exterminating members of his own family and restructuring the family to suit himself.”

“You think he’s after the family fortune,” MacNeil concluded.

“I think the Wyatt genes have produced another sociopath. The ultimate sociopath—a cold-blooded murderer.”

When he walked away, MacNeil got back into the Chevy with Childress, and they watched Elliott’s town car stop at the intersection and wait while a group of party guests were transferred into Range Rovers. A gray-haired woman slipped in the slush, and her husband grabbed for her. A middle-aged couple shivered in the cold while a nervous elderly couple struggled to step up onto the Range Rover’s elevated running boards with the help of parking attendants.

“You know,” Childress said, when the vehicles were finally on their way, “when we drove past the security gates tonight, I got a look at the driveway leading to the house, and I swear it looked perfectly clear—at least as far as I could see.”

“It was,” MacNeil agreed.

“Then why in the hell is the security guard making everyone leave their vehicles out here on the main road?”

MacNeil shrugged. “Who knows?”

From the Hardcover edition.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Marlon Hood:

Playing with family in the park, coming to see the marine world or hanging out with buddies is thing that usually you may have done when you have spare time, subsequently why you don't try issue that really opposite from that. A single activity that make you not sense tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you already been ride on and with addition of information. Even you love Every Breath You Take: A Novel, you are able to enjoy both. It is good combination right, you still need to miss it? What kind of hang type is it? Oh seriously its mind hangout folks. What? Still don't buy it, oh come on its named reading friends.

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