

AND  
EVERYTHING  
NICE

KIM MORITSUGU



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**Summary:** After joining a community choir, Stephanie helps a new friend recover her personal journal from a blackmailer. (RL 4.6)



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PO Box 5626, Stn. B  
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ORCA BOOK PUBLISHERS  
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## PROLOGUE

One day, a few years ago, I found a wallet in the parking lot of the mall where I worked. It was sitting on the ground, open, right under the driver's door of a BMW. Like it fell from the driver's lap when he got out of the car and he didn't notice.

The wallet bulged with cash. Four hundred dollars' worth. And credit cards, a bank card, a driver's license. Everything.

I picked it up and looked around. Was anyone running back to the car in a panic? Nope. The parking lot was empty of pedestrians. And the spot where I stood was

out of sight of the mall's outdoor video cameras. No one would see if I slipped the wallet into my bag and kept walking. Or if I removed the cash and dropped the wallet back on the ground.

I stood there for a minute and considered those options. And others. I could leave the wallet where I found it, money and all. Or I could write a note, stick it under the windshield wiper, and turn the wallet into mall security. But I didn't trust some of the guards who worked there.

In the end, I left a note with my name and my cell number. I took the wallet into work. An hour later, I handed it—contents intact—to a relieved man who matched the picture on the driver's license. As soon as he got it, he pulled out a fifty-dollar bill and gave it to me.

“Thanks for your honesty,” he said.

I took the fifty. Who wouldn't?

## CHAPTER ONE

**M**y mom, Joanne, heard about the community rock choir from her teacher friend, Wendy. I heard about it from Joanne. So no wonder I wasn't interested. Not that I didn't get along with my mom. I did. I mean, I was twenty-four and working full-time as manager of the Gap store in Fairview Mall. But I still lived with her in the townhouse where I grew up.

Joanne liked my company. I liked not paying rent while I was saving to buy a car. For a fifty-five-year-old mom, she was pretty chill. And I was pretty easygoing.

I always have been. Except for when I was nineteen and dropped out of university after one semester. And refused to ever go back.

We were over that, and things were all good between us. But I didn't want to join a choir that met on Tuesday nights in a church and sang rock music. I didn't even like rock music. I was more into pop and urban, top-40-type tunes.

"There *are* pop tunes on the playlist," Joanne said. This was one night in September after the choir's first practice. She came home, warmed up the Thai food I'd ordered in, sat down to eat it and raved about the fun she'd had. "I Gotta Feeling' by the Black Eyed Peas, for instance. You like that song, don't you?"

"I liked it when it was current."

"And there's a Pointer Sisters song. Talk about music from my era."

“Who the hell are the Pointer Sisters?”

“And there’s something by Journey on the list, and ‘Honesty’ by Billy Joel. I love that song.”

“Billy Joel? Are you kidding me? Next you’ll say the choir’s singing Elton John.”

“How did you know?”

“Look, I’m glad you found something to do that you like. A bunch of people your age singing classic rock just doesn’t sound like my scene. At all. No offense.”

She sagged in her chair. “Oh, Stephanie.”

I hated when she said my name like that. Like I’d disappointed her. “What?”

“You were such a good singer when you were little, such a born performer. I think you’d like the choir.”

She also thought that by working in retail, I was throwing away some bright future I could have had. The kind of future university grads have.

“I’m not a good singer,” I said. “I never was. You just thought I was good because you’re my mom.”

“How about if you come to choir practice next week and try it, one time? The choir members aren’t all my age. Some are in their twenties and thirties. And Wendy and I are in the soprano section. You wouldn’t have to hang out with us, or even talk to us. You’d be an alto or a tenor with your raspy voice.”

I picked up my phone from the coffee table and pretended it had vibrated. “I missed a call from Nathan. I should call him back. I’m working twelve to nine tomorrow, so I’m staying at his place tonight.”

“Say you’ll at least think about the choir. I’ll pay the fee if you join.”

She had that right.

“I’ll think about it. I promise.”



“Good. Could you pass me my wallet? It’s in my purse, on the floor. I want to give you money for the Thai food.”

I fished out the wallet and waited while she picked through the receipts, ticket stubs and dollar bills she had stuffed into it.

She said, “That’s weird. I thought I had more cash than this. Did you take some out of here already?”

“How could I have done that? I just handed you the wallet two seconds ago.”

“I meant before I went to choir practice.”

Was she losing her mind? “I wasn’t here before your practice, remember? I got home from work after you left. And ordered the Thai food. As you instructed.”

She shook her head. “So you did. I’m sorry, I wasn’t thinking. Here.” She handed me a ten and a twenty. “I thought I had more cash on me. I must have spent it somewhere.”

“I love how your first thought when money is missing is that I took it.”

“I said I was sorry.” She smiled up at me. “I used to take money from my mother’s wallet all the time when I was a teenager—a five here, a few singles there. She never noticed.”

“Well, I’m not a teenager. And I guess I’m more trustworthy than you were.”

So far I was, anyway.

Kim Moritsugu is the author of four previous novels. *The Glenwood Treasure* (2003) was shortlisted for the Arthur Ellis Award for Best Crime Novel. She also leads a walking tour for Heritage Toronto, teaches creative writing at the Humber School for Writers, writes a food blog called *The Hungry Novelist* and sings in a community rock/pop choir.