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Best-Selling Author of the Yada Yada House of Hope Novels



faithful

a novel

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Praise for *Faithful*

“*Faithful* by Kim Cash Tate is not only beautifully written, it is a novel that changes you, that makes you question your heart and attitudes. I can’t recommend it highly enough!”

— Colleen Coble, bestselling
author of *Lonestar Homecoming*

“Kim is a wonderful storyteller. As she paints the picture of the women in this book they don’t seem like characters from a novel, they sound like you, like me. When they wrestle with their faith, we wrestle with them and find out, as they do, that God is always faithful.”

— Sheila Walsh, international
speaker and bestselling author

“Three friends. Two husbands. One Romeo. All are shaken to the core as author Kimberly Cash Tate peels away layers of lies and self-deception to reveal the rotten core of infidelity and its tragic consequences. But this novel is also about hope and healing as her well-drawn characters discover the freedom of being FAITHFUL.”

— Neta Jackson, author of the Yada
Yada Prayer Group and Yada
Yada House of Hope novels

“Good fiction has to grab me, knock me around, and make me care about what is happening to the characters. But great fiction inspires me. Kim Cash Tate accomplishes it all in *Faithful*.”

— Marilyn Meberg, Women of
Faith speaker and author of
Tell Me Everything

“Kim Cash Tate’s enjoyable novel is true to both the realities of life and the hope found through faith in Jesus. Romance meets real life with a godly heart! Hooray!”

— Stasi Eldredge, best-selling
author of *Captivating*

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faithful

KIM CASH TATE



NASHVILLE DALLAS MEXICO CITY RIO DE JANEIRO

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*To Quentin and Cameron,
may you always be strongly aware
of God's faithfulness in your lives.*

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One

CYDNEY SANDERS JUMPED at the ringing of the phone, startled out of slumber. She rolled over, peeked at the bedside clock, and groaned. She had twenty whole minutes before the alarm would sound, and she wanted every minute of that twenty. Only her sister would be calling at five forty in the morning. Every morning she called, earlier and earlier, with a new something that couldn't wait regarding that wedding of hers. Not that Stephanie was partial to mornings. She was apt to call several times during the day and into the evening as well. Everything wedding related was urgent.

Cyd nestled back under the covers, rolling her eyes at the fifth ring. Tonight she would remember to turn that thing off. She was tired of Stephanie worrying her from dawn to dusk.

Her heart skipped suddenly and she bolted upright. *The wedding is tomorrow.* The day seemed to take forever to get here, and yet it had come all too quickly. She sighed, dread descending at once with a light throbbing of her head. She might have felt stressed no matter what date her sister had chosen for the wedding. That she chose Cyd's fortieth birthday made it infinitely worse.

She sank back down at the thought of it. *Forty.* She didn't mind the age itself. She'd always thought it would be kind of cool, in fact. At forty, she'd be right in the middle of things, a lot of life behind her, a lot of living yet to do. She'd be at a stride, confident in her path, her purpose. She would have climbed atop decades of prayer and study, ready to walk in some wisdom. Celebrate a little understanding. Stand firmly in faith. Count it all joy.

And she'd look good. She was sure of that. She'd work out during her pregnancies, and while the babies nursed and sucked down her tummy, she would add weights to the cardio routine to shape and tone. As she aged, her metabolism could turn on her if it wanted to; she had something for that too. She would switch up her workout every few weeks, from jogging to mountain bike riding to Tae Bo, all to keep her body guessing, never letting it plateau. Her husband would thank her.

He would also throw her a party. She wasn't much of a party person, but she always knew she'd want a big one on the day she turned forty. It wouldn't have to be a surprise. She'd heard enough stories of husbands unable to keep a party secret anyway. They'd plan it together, and she would kick in the new season in high spirits, surrounded by the people she loved.

Now that she was one day away, she still had no problem with forty. It was the other stuff that had shown up with it—forty, never been married, childless. Now, despite her distinguished career as a classics professor at Washington University in St. Louis, she was questioning her path and her purpose and dreading her new season— and the fact that she was forced to ring it in as maid of honor in her younger sister's wedding ... her *much younger* sister.

She was still irritated that Stephanie kept the date even after their mother reminded her that October 18 was Cyd's birthday.

"Why does that matter?" Stephanie had said.

The only thing that mattered to Stephanie was Stephanie, and if she wanted something, she was going to make it happen. Like now. She cared not a whit that she was ringing Cyd's phone off the hook before dawn, waking Cyd and the new puppy, who was yelping frantically in her crate in the kitchen.

Cyd gave up, reached over, and snatched up the phone. Before it came fully to her ear, she heard her sister's voice.

"Cyd, I forgot to tell you last night—*stop*," Stephanie giggled. "You see I'm on the phone."

Cyd switched off her alarm. "Good morning to you too, Steph." She swung her legs out from under the warm bedding and shivered as they hit the air. The days were warm and muggy still, but the nights were increasingly cooler.

From a hook inside the closet, she grabbed her plum terry robe, which at Cyd's five-nine hit her above the knee, and slipped it over her cotton pajama shorts and tank. Her ponytail caught under the robe and she lifted it out, let it flop back down. It was a good ways down her back, thick with

ringlets from air drying, a naturally deep reddish brown. Her face had the same richness, a beautiful honey brown, smooth and flawless.

Stephanie was giggling still as she and her fiancé, Lindell, whispered in the background.

I can't believe she woke me up for this. Cyd pushed her feet into her slippers and padded downstairs with a yawn to let out the puppy. "Do you do this when you're talking to Momma?"

Stephanie fumbled with the phone. "Do what?"

"Make it obvious that you and Lindell spent the night together?"

"Cyd, we are grown and will be married tomorrow. Who gives a flip if we spent the night together?"

"Stephanie ..." Cyd closed her eyes at the bottom of the stairs as all manner of responses swirled in her mind. Sometimes she wondered if she and Stephanie had really grown up in the same family with the same two parents who loved God and made His ways abundantly clear. Much of it had sailed right over Stephanie's head. Cyd had attempted to nail it down for her over the years, particularly in the area of relationships, but Stephanie never warmed to any notion of chastity, or even monogamy. In fact, when she'd called to announce her engagement six months ago, Cyd thought the husband-to-be was Warren, the man Stephanie had been bringing lately when she stopped by.

But Cyd had vowed moons ago to stop lecturing her sister and pray instead. She took a deep breath and expelled it loudly enough for Stephanie to know she was moving on, but only with effort.

"So, you forgot to tell me something?" She headed to the kitchen, where Reese was barking with attitude, indignant that Cyd was taking too long to get there.

"Girl, listen to this," Stephanie said. "LaShaun called Momma yesterday, upset 'cause we didn't include a guest on her invitation, talking about she wants to bring Jo-Jo. That's why I *didn't* put 'and guest' on her invitation. I'm not paying for that loser to come up in there, eat our food, drink, and act a fool. And why is she calling now anyway? Hello? The deadline for RSVPs was last month. Can you believe her?"

“Stephanie, was there a need to call so early to tell me this?” Cyd clicked on the kitchen light.

“Don’t you think it’s a trip?”

“Okay, yeah.”

“I know! And you know Momma. She said, ‘That’s your cousin. Just keep the peace and let her bring him.’ I’m tempted to call LaShaun right now and tell her both of them can jump in a lake.”

Cyd headed to the crate under the desk portion of the kitchen counter. Tired though she was, Reese’s drama tickled her inside. She was whimpering and pawing at the gated opening, and when Cyd unlocked it, the energetic twelve-week-old shot out. A mix of cocker spaniel and who knew what else, with dark chocolate wavy hair and tan patches on the neck, underbelly, and paws, she’d reminded Cyd of a peanut butter cup the moment she nabbed her heart at the shelter.

Reese jumped on Cyd, then rolled over for a tummy rub. Three seconds later she dashed toward the back door. At her age she could barely make it through the night without an accident. If Cyd delayed now, she’d be cleaning up a mess. She attached the leash and led her out.

“Well, what do you think?” Stephanie asked.

“About telling LaShaun to jump in the lake?” Cyd turned on the lights in the backyard and stepped outside with Reese, tightening her robe.

Stephanie sucked her teeth. “I mean about the whole thing.”

“Well, Momma and Daddy are paying,” Cyd said, since it seemed her sister had forgotten, “so if Momma doesn’t mind Jo-Jo coming, why worry about it? You’ll be so busy you probably won’t see much of them anyway. No point getting your cousin *and* Aunt Gladys mad over something like this.”

“Whatever,” Stephanie said. “I should’ve known you’d say the same thing as Momma. I still might call LaShaun, just to let her know she should’ve called me directly, not tried to go through Momma.”

“All right, go ahead and ponder that. I’ve got to get ready for class and —”

“I wasn’t finished,” Stephanie whined. “Did you talk to Dana?”

“I talked to her last night. Why?”

“So she told you about the shoes?”

“Mm-hmm.” Cyd moved to different spots in the yard, tugging on the leash to get Reese to stop digging and do her business. A light popped on in the house next door and she saw Ted, a professor in the chemistry department, moving around in his kitchen. Many of her colleagues from Wash U lived in her Clayton neighborhood—six on her block alone.

“I wasn’t trying to be difficult,” Stephanie said, “but something told me to stop by her house yesterday to see for myself what kind of shoes she bought. You said they were cute, but those things were dreadful.”

“Stephanie, they’re flower-girl shoes. All flower-girl shoes are cute. Mackenzie tried them on with the dress when I was over there last week, and she looked adorable.”

“The *dress* is adorable—because I picked it out—but those tired Mary Janes with the plain strap across the top have got to go. Is that what they wear at white weddings or something?”

“I don’t know. Google it—‘official flower-girl shoe at white weddings.’”

“Ha, ha, very funny. I’m just sayin’ ...”

Cyd led Reese back into the house, half listening as Stephanie droned on about some snazzier shoes with rhinestones Dana could’ve gotten and why she shouldn’t have trusted Dana to make the choice in the first place.

She’d get over it. Stephanie did a lot of complaining about a lot of people, but there was no doubt—she loved Dana. Dana had been like family ever since she and Cyd met on the volleyball team in junior high, when Stephanie was just a baby. Stephanie had always looked up to her like a second big sister, and when Dana got married and had Mackenzie and Mark, Stephanie actually volunteered to babysit regularly. Those kids adored “Aunt Stephanie,” and when it came time to plan her wedding, Stephanie didn’t hesitate to include them ... even though a couple of great-aunts questioned her appointing white kids as flower girl and ring bearer.

“... so, long story short, I asked Dana to take ’em back and find some shoes with some pizzazz.”

“She told me she’s not hunting for shoes today. She doesn’t have time.” Cyd stopped in the office, awakened her computer screen with a shake of

the mouse, and started skimming an e-mail from a student.

“She told me that too,” Stephanie said. “So I’m hoping you can do it.”

“Do what?”

“Find some cute shoes.”

“I have to work.” And even if she didn’t, she wouldn’t get roped into this one. She’d gone above and beyond for Stephanie already. This week alone, she’d taken care of several items Stephanie was supposed to handle. If her sister wanted to sweat the flower girl’s shoes the day before the wedding, she’d have to do it alone.

“But your class is at eight o’clock. You’ve got the whole day after that.”

Cyd donned a tight-lipped smile to beat back her annoyance. “Stephanie, you know that teaching is only part of what I do. I have a paper due for a conference coming up, and I’m already behind.”

She unhooked Reese’s leash and watched her run around in circles, delighted with her freedom. But when Cyd headed for the stairs, Reese fell quickly in step. No way would she be left behind.

“How can you even focus on work today?” Stephanie sounded perplexed. “Aren’t you just too excited about the big event? Girl, you know this is your wedding too.”

Cyd paused on a stair. “How is this my wedding too?”

“Since it looks like you won’t be getting married yourself”—Stephanie had a shrug in her voice—“you’ve at least gotten a chance to plan one through me. You know, living vicariously. Hasn’t it been fun?”

Cyd held the phone aloft and stared at it. Did Stephanie really think these last few months had been *fun*? She had involved Cyd in every decision from her dress to her colors to the style, thickness, and font of the invitations to the type of headpiece Mackenzie should wear—all of which *could* have been fun if Stephanie had really wanted her sister’s opinions.

What Stephanie wanted was for Cyd to accompany her about town to every wedding-related appointment, listen with interest as she debated with herself about gowns, floral arrangements, and what to include on the wedding registry, and affirm her ultimate picks. She also wanted Cyd to handle whatever she deemed drudgery. And Cyd didn’t mind; as the maid of honor, she thought it her duty to address invitations, order favors, and the