

DOOMED JUNE BRIDE *Will I Walk Down the Aisle?*

FREE
SHIPPING ON
BOOKS

TRUE STORY

**FATHER
DOESN'T
KNOW
BEST**

Take Your Own Advice

**STRANGER IN
THE MIRROR**

Abuse Destroyed My Life

**OUR SUMMER
STAYCATION**

I Don't Need Luxury for Fun!

**REBUILDING
OUR LOVE**

Marrying my Ex-Husband

JUNE 2017 \$4.99 K44290



0 09128 44290 7 0 6 >

OVER 800 EXCLUSIVE DESIGNS AVAILABLE!
CALL 1-800-323-8104 OR WWW.BECHECKS.COM

MORE MARVEL ONLINE

Avengers - 01240
Leather Cover and Labels - 01240

Guardians of the Galaxy - 01249
Leather Cover and Labels - 01249

Words of Faith w/verse
"With God all things are possible." - 00551
Leather Cover and Labels - 00551

Live, Laugh, Love, Learn w/verse "Life is not measured by the breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away" - 00332
Leather Cover and Labels - 00332

Tropical Paradise - 00052
Leather Cover and Labels - 00052

Painted Ponies - 00600
Leather Cover and Labels - 00600

God Bless America - 00006
Fabric Cover and Labels - 00006

Grandkids Rulet w/verse
"I'd rather be with my grandkids." - 00437
Leather Cover and Labels - 00437

Footprints w/verse
"One night I dreamed that I was walking along the beach with the Lord." - 00667
Fabric Cover and Labels - 00667

Seasons of the Owl - 00739
Leather Cover and Labels - 00739

Lena Liu's Butterfly Gardens - 00311
Leather Cover and Labels - 00311

New Day w/verse
"Each day brings hope!" - 00447
Leather Cover and Labels - 00447

Touch of Color - 00905
Leather Cover and Labels - 00905

On the Wings of Hope - 00384
One Image, Leather Cover and Labels - 00384
A portion of the proceeds will be donated to fight breast cancer.

America's National Parks - 00055
Leather Cover - 00151
Labels - 00055

Just Bee w/verse
"Bee Kind" - 00386
Leather Cover and Labels - 00386

Rescued is My Breed of Choice - 00379
Leather Cover and Labels - 00379
A portion of the proceeds will be donated to a national no-kill animal shelter.

Rescued is Something to Purr - 00525
Leather Cover and Labels - 00525

Stepping Out w/verse
"Sassy" - 00240
Leather Cover and Labels - 00240

Cowboy Boots - 00434
Leather Cover and Labels - 00434

Hello Kitty® Colors - 01079
Leather Cover and Labels - 01079

Lena Liu's Flights of Fancy - 00007
Leather Cover and Labels - 00007

Hawaiian Sunsets - 00181
Leather Cover and Labels - 00181

Lena Liu's Floral Borders - 00088 w/optional verse "Lord bless and keep you." - 00117
Leather Cover and Labels - 00088

Sunflowers - 00334
Leather Cover and Labels - 00334

Thomas Kinkade's Faith for All Seasons w/verse "Believe all things are possible with God" - 00105
Leather Cover and Labels - 00105

Winter Calm - 00017
Leather Cover and Labels - 00017

Classic Peanuts - 00708
Leather Cover and Labels - 00708

Hope for a Cure - 00585
Leather Cover and Labels - 00585
A portion of the proceeds will be donated to fight breast cancer.

Lena Liu's Enchanted Wings - 00026
Leather Cover and Labels - 00026

Faith, Hope, Christ - 00633
Fabric Cover and Labels - 00633

Comical Cats w/verse
"Blossoming with Purr-sonality!" - 00570
Leather Cover and Labels - 00570

Ohio State University - 00513
Leather Cover and Labels - 00513
More teams available online!

Chicago Cubs™ MLB® Logo - 00828
Leather Cover & Labels - 00145
All 30 teams available!

A Walk on the Beach - 01020
Leather Cover & Labels - 01020

Challis & Roos Awesome Owls - 00337
Leather Cover and Labels - 00337

Polka Dots - 00616
Fabric Cover and Labels - 00616

Imperial - 00165
One Image, Leather Cover and Labels - 00165

Chevron Chic - 00678
Fabric Cover and Labels - 00678

Blue Safety - 00027
One Image, Leather Cover and Labels - 00155

Reflections - 00125
Leather Cover and Labels - 00125

Parchment - 00612
Burgundy Leather Cover - 00030-004
Labels - 00032-008

5th Avenue - 00155
One Image, Leather Cover and Labels - 00155

EXCLUSIVE ACCESSORIES ALSO AVAILABLE!

Visit www.BEchecks.com to See Our Full Selection

3 EASY WAYS TO ORDER

- PHONE 1-800-323-8104**
Phone Hours: Mon-Fri 7:00 am to 10:00 pm (CT)
Sat/Sun 7:00 am to 9:00 pm (CT)
Mention offer code to receive this special offer. 2-box minimum and processing fee apply. See habla Español. Call for Signature Required Delivery option.
- INTERNET—SAFE SECURE SITE**
www.BEchecks.com
- MAIL—Send completed Order Form**
Also include:
 - Payment check or money order (no cash please)
 - Voided Check with changes noted OR Reorder Form
 - Deposit Slip from same account Mail to address at the top of coupon

Feel Secure with **SECURESHIP™**
Trackable • Guaranteed Delivery
Includes FREE IN-PLANT RUSH

- Trackable to you
- Guaranteed delivery
- All check boxes ship together...SECURELY
- It's FASTER

BRADFORD EXCHANGE CHECKS

9305 N. Milwaukee Ave. Niles, IL 60714

***LIMITED-TIME OFFER FOR NEW CUSTOMERS**
Please respond promptly!

NAME _____
PHONE () _____ Day Evening
E-MAIL ADDRESS _____

Check the items you wish to order and enter the price in the spaces provided. Only ONE check design per order.

CHECK DESIGN # _____
If no check start number is specified, 1001 will be used.

SINGLE TOP TEAR CHECKS		DUPLICATE TOP TEAR CHECKS	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Box	\$6.99	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Box	\$8.49
<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Boxes	\$19.98 \$6.99	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Boxes	\$16.98 \$8.49
<input type="checkbox"/> 4 Boxes	\$27.96 \$13.98	<input type="checkbox"/> 4 Boxes	\$33.96 \$16.98
2nd & 4th box FREE		2nd & 4th box FREE	

Enter Check price from chart above \$ _____

Distinctive Lettering **\$2.50 each** De English **FREE**

CORDIAL GRAND Script English

Matching Cover Code No. _____ add \$19.99

Matching Labels Code No. _____ (If name and address differ show checks, please enclose separate paper)

Add \$6.99 for DESIGNER Labels
Add \$7.99 for CHOICE * & MASTER Labels

EZSHIELD CHECK FRAUD PROTECTION PROGRAM® \$2.50 x # of Boxes = \$ _____

EZSHIELD PRO® (Must also purchase EZShield Check Fraud Protection above) Add \$8.00 total \$ _____

REQUIRED SERVICE/HANDLING \$2.95 x # of Boxes/Items = \$ _____ **Required**

SECURESHIP™ (4-9 bus. days) **Checks Only**
Trackable • Guaranteed Delivery
Includes FREE IN-PLANT RUSH (045) \$8.95 total \$ _____
 IN-PLANT RUSH (checks only) Saves 1-3 Days (070) \$5.99 \$ _____

Untrackable delivery: Allow 2-3 weeks for delivery. All items shipped separately. Delivery to Alaska and Hawaii may take longer. **FREE**

OFFER CODE: 21976XCH SUBTOTAL \$ _____

Add sales tax for shipment to Illinois (0.25%) \$ _____

18NEE7D9 TOTAL: \$ _____

Major League Baseball trademarks and copyrights are used with permission of Major League Baseball Properties, Inc. Visit the official website MLB.com Bradford/MLBP2006 © 1976, 2015 Sannio Co., LTD. ©Georgia Janisse ©Sandra Kock ©Thomas Kinkade, The Thomas Kinkadee Co., Morgan Hill, CA. ©Challis & Roos ©Dianry ©Susan Wimpel©Beth Yarbrough, licensed by Linda McDonald, Inc. ©Peanuts Worldwide LLC. ©Marvel.com Each check features 4 different images. *Offer valid on Top Tear checks only. Prices and offers subject to change. ©2017 Bradford Exchange Checks 18-00055-0112371

TRUE STORY



President
Frances M. Adrian
Vice President
Loretta Folk
Publisher
Kelley L. Allen

Art & Production, Director
Nicole Manogian

True Story, Editor
Samantha Hazell

For Subscription Questions Contact Us At
212-922-9244 or subscriptions@truerenditionsllc.com

ADVERTISING SALES OFFICES
Dina Rositani

Email Sales Office: DMRMultimedias@aol.com

TRUE STORY (ISSN 0195-3117) is published monthly by True Renditions, LLC. 105 E. 34th Street, Suite 141, New York, NY 10016; phone: (212) 922-9244. • **Subscription rates:** US and Possessions: 6 months, \$24.00; one year, \$38.94. Canada and all other countries add \$10.00 per year for postage. • **Back issues:** Add \$1.50 to the cover price of each copy when ordering by mail to cover cost of postage and handling. Make checks payable to True Renditions, LLC and send to **TRUE STORY**, True Renditions, LLC, 105 E. 34th Street, Suite 141, New York, NY 10016. • **Subscription Inquiries, New Subscriptions or Renewals:** True Renditions, LLC, 105 E. 34th Street, Suite 141, New York, NY 10016; phone: (212) 922-9244. • **Cancellation and Refund Policy:** Magazine subscription cancellations for True Story and True Confessions will be honored under the following criteria. Refunds will be issued on a pro-rated basis on copies that haven't been mailed out at the time of the cancellation. Refunds will only be issued in the name of the person who receives the subscription. If you received half of your subscription, then your subscription is considered fulfilled but you can receive the remaining issues. There are no refunds or returns on purchases of single copies or eBooks. Subscription cancellation and refunds requests must be made in writing and sent to: True Renditions, LLC., 105 E. 34th Street, Suite 141, New York, NY 10016 • **Change of Address:** Six weeks' notice essential; send old as well as new address to TRUE STORY, True Renditions, LLC. 105 E. 34th Street, Suite 141, New York, NY 10016. • **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to True Renditions, LLC. 105 E. 34th Street, Suite 141, New York, NY 10016. Foreign editions are handled through the True Renditions, LLC. 105 E. 34th Street, Suite 141, New York, NY 10016. Periodical postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Copyright© by True Renditions, LLC. All rights reserved. Title **TRUE STORY** is a registered trademark in the US and Canada. • **Manuscripts and photographs:** All manuscripts and photographs will be carefully considered, but publisher cannot be responsible for loss or damage. It is advisable to keep a duplicate copy for your records. Only those manuscripts and photographs accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed return envelope with sufficient postage will be returned. Names of real persons or actual business firms are never used in this magazine except in those stories accompanied by the author's name. If the names of actual persons appear, it is a matter of coincidence. All photographs posed by professional models unless otherwise noted. • **TRUE STORY** does not knowingly accept deceptive or misleading advertising. • **PRINTED IN USA**

This Month's True Stories!



page 32

2 Stranger in the Mirror

4 Doomed June Bride

8 Resisting Temptation

12 April Showers

16 Wedding Day Disaster

20 Our Summer Staycation

24 Join Forces in June

28 Father Doesn't Know Best

32 Rekindled Romance or Disastrous Date?

36 Rebuilding Our Love



page 28

Inspirational Mini-Stories

44 Miracle of Faith
Father's Day Blessing

64 Visit from Beyond
Daddy's Girl

Every Month

40 *Scrumptious Summer!*



page 8



STRANGER IN THE MIRROR

Abuse Destroyed My Life

“And the prince and princess lived happily ever after.”

I closed my eyes savoring the picture I’d formed in my mind of two happy people riding off into the sunset.

“Are you reading those stupid fairy tales again? Where’s my dinner, Bridget?”

Hurtful memories of harsh words and my book being yanked out of my hands and tossed on the floor brought me back to the nightmare that was my reality. I closed my eyes a moment knowing I would never forget last night. I started shaking when I heard a car pull up outside. I peeked out the window and saw it was my sister Marie popping by for a visit—just what I needed.

“Bridget, are you home?”

My sister’s voice sent shivers of fear running through me. She couldn’t see me in the condition I was in. I cursed myself for ever giving her the house key. What would Keith do if he found out? Instead of answering her, I scurried into the master closet and carefully closed the door, leaving it open a crack so I could hear. I sat on the floor and waited.

“Bridget?” Marie called again. “Where are you? You promised me you’d go shopping with me this morning.”

I kept quiet and listened as she searched for me. Marie stopped in the bedroom close to where I hid and muttered. “She’s not here. Darn her anyway. I’ll have to leave her a note.”

I listened for Marie’s car to start and when the sound of the engine was gone I ventured out to read her note. I finished and wadded it into a ball which I tossed. Keith didn’t like me seeing my sister or any of my family. I had to sneak around to do it.

Tears of shame and anger poured down my face. My dear, sadistic husband would be home in a few hours. The thought of seeing him again made me queasy. I hurried into the bathroom and threw up. I wondered if he’d pull his usual act and beg forgiveness or beat me some more? There was no predicting my handsome husband’s state of mind or what he might do.

Whatever game of meanness he played had changed the night before. It wasn’t like him to hit me in places where people could see the bruising that always followed. If the whisky he’d drunk made him forget, he’d take it out on me. He blamed me for everything.

What was I going to do? I ran to the bathroom to fix my hair and apply some make-up, but the effort caused me so much pain I had to quit. I winced at the battered face in the mirror. Was that really me?

When the clock struck four, I hurried to the kitchen to start supper. Keith wanted dinner ready the moment he walked in the door. My lapse with the fairy tale book the

previous day seemed to have triggered the whole thing, so I made sure to hide it. I loved that book and didn’t want him touching it.

We hadn’t spoken since the night before. He’d left for work early that morning. I’d pretended to be asleep until he left. So much fear and anger raged inside of me that I knew I’d never be able to forgive him for what he’d done—not this time. I knew I’d loved him once, but I could no longer recall what it felt like or even why I’d loved him.

I wished that I’d listened to Mama when she said, “I’m sorry to have to say this, Bridget, but I don’t trust that young man. I think you’re going to regret marrying him someday.”

Poor Mama—I’d rolled my eyes at her and let her have it. “You never like anyone I go out with, Mama. Keith’s different. He’ll treat me right...you’ll see.”

I tried to leave him after the first time he threw me against the wall and slapped me. He came home from work early and caught me packing. This time he kicked me a couple of times as I lay on the floor.

“If you leave me, Bridget, I’ll go after you and your whole family.”

I’d have walked out the door if my older brother Nathan hadn’t moved away. He had a black belt in the martial arts and could handle someone like Keith. I thought of calling him but didn’t want to burden him with my problems. I had no one to blame but myself for the mess I was in.

My mind returned to the present. Potatoes were baking in the oven and a salad was on the table, but dinner wasn’t quite ready yet when I heard the front door open. My heart sped up. He was early. Would he still be mad that dinner wasn’t ready? I pasted a smile on my hurting face as he came through the kitchen door.

“Hi, honey. I finished my project early and decided to surprise you.”

I did my best to hide the pain and revulsion I felt.

“Something smells good,” he said.

“It will be ready in a few minutes.”

I kept my eyes down, willing him to leave me alone.

His cheerfulness felt creepy. We didn’t talk during dinner. I tried to eat slowly; but it was too painful for me to chew and when Keith got up to use the restroom, I dumped my plate in the trash and quickly covered it with wads of paper towels. When he returned, I stood at the sink rinsing dishes and cleaning up. Keith came up behind me and put his arms around me. It took everything I had not to scream and push him away.

“Honey, I’m sorry about last night. I promise I’ll never do it again, and if you’ll let me make it up to you, I’ll take you to dinner tomorrow night.”

I forced myself to speak. “Sure, Keith. That would be great.” I said woodenly.

I’d left a box of tampons on the dresser in the hopes he’d leave me alone and it worked. He slept like a baby while I tossed and turned from the bruises he’d given me.

He left early again the next morning. I pretended to sleep until after he’d gone. I was on my second cup of coffee when the doorbell rang. I spied a familiar face through the peep hole and threw open the door.

“Nathan!”

“Hi, Sis.” The smile faded on my brother’s face. “Did that creep do this to you?”

“Yes.” I admitted.

Nathan frowned. “How long has it been going on?”

“Since a few months after we were married I think.”

My brother drew me carefully into his arms and gave me a gentle hug. “I wish you’d told me, Bridget. I’d have put a stop to it.”

“He said he’d hurt all of us if I told anyone or tried to leave.” I sobbed.

Nate handed me a fresh hanky. “He’s not going to hurt anyone; I won’t let him.”

My brother helped me stuff my few belongings into a suitcase, an old box I’d saved and a large black trash bag. Nate hauled it out to his truck and came back to fetch me.

(Continued on page 53) **3**



DOOMED JUNE BRIDE

Will I Walk Down the Aisle?

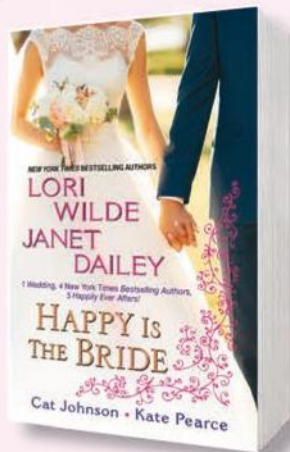
“Rosemary, where are you? I’ve been sitting here at the wedding shop for over thirty minutes waiting for you to show up. I do have a life too you know.”

“Sorry Mom, I got tied up. I’ll be there as soon as I can.”

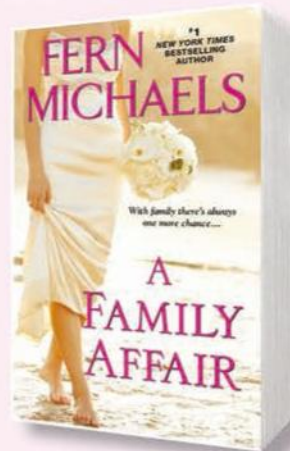
“If you’re not here in fifteen minutes I’m leaving.”

I heard a click. “Mom, are you still there? I guess not,” I mumbled.

Say
“I DO”
 To These
 Romantic Reads!



1 Wedding,
 4 New York Times
 Bestselling Authors,
 5 Happily Ever Afters!
“Sexy and heartwarming.”
 —RT Book Reviews, 4 Stars

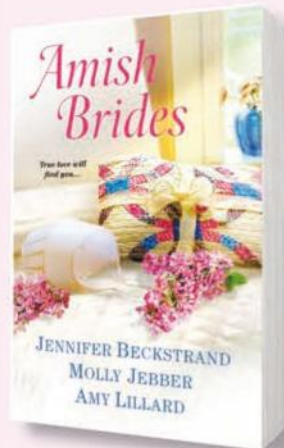


Join #1 New York Times
 bestselling author Fern Michaels
 for a story of unexpected love,
 friendship—and family.

**“Michaels’ many fans and
 traditional romance lovers
 will embrace this enjoyably
 escapist offering.”**
 —Booklist

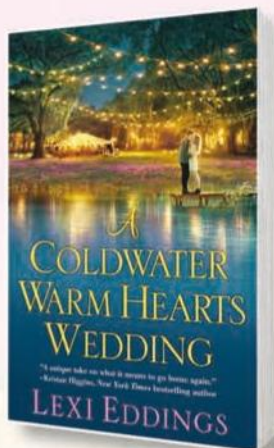
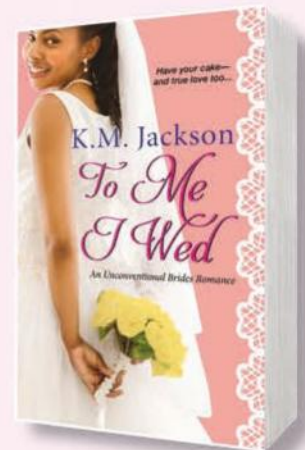
Three rising stars of
 Amish romance bring to life
 three unforgettable couples
 on their wedding days...

**“Celebrates women’s
 resourceful strength and
 pluck...delightfully sweet.”**
 —PW, STARRED REVIEW
 on *Sweet As Honey*
 by Jennifer Beckstrand



Who says you need to find
 Mr. Perfect before you can
 have that special day?
 Not *this* unconventional bride!

**“This engaging romance
 (no pun intended)
 will leave readers
 clamoring for more.”**
 —Publishers Weekly



Coldwater Cove, Oklahoma
 is the perfect place for anyone
 who wants to put down roots,
 and for one man to learn what
 it means to come home.

**“Sure to appeal to fans
 of Debbie Macomber
 or Susan Wiggs...the perfect
 read for a quiet afternoon.”**
 —Shelf Awareness,
 STARRED REVIEW
 on *The Coldwater Warm Hearts Club*

KENSINGTON PUBLISHING CORP.—America’s Independent Publisher
 Available Everywhere Books Are Sold
 KensingtonBooks.com



My wedding was only weeks away and I still hadn't picked a wedding gown. I'd planned on wearing Mom's, but when we pulled it out of storage we found that moths had gotten to it. I didn't want to pay the cost of a new gown. I'd checked out the prices for some of the ones I liked and they were outrageous. There was no way I would feel good about sticking Mom and Dad with another bill, nor could I afford it myself. One of my friends told me about a small shop that had cheaper prices and I wanted to check it out. I'd hoped to go there alone, but Mom got wind of it and insisted on going with me.

The high cost of having a wedding was one of the reasons I wanted to have a small wedding, but Billy's mother Kylie wouldn't hear of it. She'd insisted on inviting all their family and friends. It didn't matter to the woman that my parents were footing the bill. Personally, I couldn't stand my snobby future mother-in-law and I'm sure she felt the same way about me.

It was a good thing Mom and I were the ones handling the invitations because we sent out the ones we thought should come. I figured Kylie would invite the others anyway, but after thinking about it I decided to send out small notes explaining to the uninvited that we were sorry, but the wedding would be a small affair and if they showed up they would be denied entrance. I knew it would anger Kylie, but the more I was around the woman, the more I didn't care. My brother agreed to watch the door and keep out unwanted guests. Anyone without an invitation would not get by him.

I didn't mention any of this to my fiancé Billy. I knew he'd side with his mother.

As I pulled up to the shop, my phone rang. "How dare you tell some of our friends and family they're not to attend the wedding!"

"I'm sorry, Kylie, but since you're not paying you have no say in the matter."

Kylie said a few more choice words and hung up. Billy called a few minutes later.

"What's this I hear about you not

inviting my family and friends?"

"We invited only close family and a few friends because the hall we rented for the reception is small and can only hold so many people. I have family and friends too."

Billy didn't say anything.

"Are you still there?"

"Rosemary, I'm going to hang up before I say something I'll regret."

Instead of going into the wedding shop I called Mom and told her I was outside, but I wasn't coming in.

"What's the matter, Rosemary? You sound upset."

"Kylie and Billy know about our invitations and I just got an earful from both of them. I need some time alone to think, so I'll see you later. Thanks for coming."

I picked a table in the far corner at my favorite bistro where I ordered coffee and a large slice of their decadent chocolate cake.

"And Kimmy," I told the server, "Please cut an extra thick piece for me."

"Bad day, Rosemary?"

"Yes. And before you ask right now I don't care if I can fit in my nonexistent wedding dress or not."

Kimmy patted me on the shoulder. "I'll bring it right out, and it's on me."

Kimmy and I were old friends. She was one of the people I'd included in the wedding invitations. She returned a moment later with a gigantic piece of gooey chocolate cake just oozing with fat and calories. It was just what I needed.

"Thanks, Kimmy. I can always count on you."

"You're welcome. It's too bad Cathy won't be able to make it to your wedding. Have you picked someone to take her place?"

"What? Cathy hasn't said anything to me."

"Oops! Sorry. I thought you knew. I ran into her yesterday at the supermarket. She said she was on her way out of town but still had to tell you she couldn't make the wedding."

"How would you like to be my Maid of Honor, Kimmy? I should have asked you in the first place, but you know how pouty Cathy gets."

"Yep. I know. I'd be happy to be your Maid of Honor. Do I have to

wear something special?"

"Not when the bride doesn't even have a dress. I was going to wear Mom's. It's a long story. I'll fill you in later."

I drowned my sorrows in the cake with its chocolate ganache glaze and caramel filling. I was just finishing up the last yummy forkful when someone walked up to my table. I looked up thinking it was Kimmy.

"Tyler! What are you doing here?"

"Hi, Rosemary. I'm visiting my folks. Do you mind if I join you?"

I motioned to one of the chairs. "Of course not."

Tyler and I spent the next thirty minutes catching up, but for some reason I didn't share the fact that I was engaged and about to be married.

He was on my mind all the way home. I'd tried hard to forget him after we'd broken up six years earlier, and seeing him again brought back a lot of memories. It was almost painful to discover I still cared for him—much more than an engaged woman should. I decided my feelings were all in my head. Billy's attitude didn't help things and I wasn't feeling much love for him at the moment.

Around seven that evening the doorbell rang. I answered it to find Tyler on my doorstep with a bouquet of flowers and a pizza.

"Hope I'm not too late for dinner." He handed me the yellow roses.

"Thanks. They're lovely, how did you find me? Never mind, Kimmy told you, didn't she? You might as well come in. The pizza sure smells good and I'm too hungry to resist. How about I make a salad to go with it?"

We talked, joked and had a great time, but I still kept my upcoming nuptials a secret. To be honest, the more we talked the more I was afraid if I told him he'd leave and I'd never see him again. I pulled out a bottle of wine I'd been saving for a special occasion and the two of us shared a few glasses. It's never taken much to get me a little inebriated, so I was soon giggling like a school girl and acting very inappropriately for a woman about to be married to

another man. I tried to think of Billy, but for some reason I couldn't remember what he looked like.

When Tyler leaned over and kissed me, I kissed him back. We started making out like teenagers. When we paused to catch our breath, he gave me a sexy smile.

"Shall we?" He asked.

"Yes."

Tyler picked me up and carried me into the bedroom where we made love and cuddled afterwards. The little voice in my head kept whispering Billy's name, but I ignored it.

My fiancé and I had only made love once since we'd started dating, and I hadn't been impressed. I figured it would get better after we were married, but being with Tyler again made me realize that Billy was a dud in bed and probably always would be.

Tyler kissed me gently on the lips. "I should never have gone away to college without you, Rosemary."

"It's all water under the bridge now."

"I'm glad I came home and we're here together again. I've really missed you. I wanted to call you, but after our fight the night we broke up I wasn't sure you'd talk to me."

I sighed and kissed him back. "You should've called, Tyler. I've missed you too."

Tyler looked at the bedside clock. "I'd better get going. My parents will get worried if I don't show up."

"I wish you could stay."

"Me too. Give me your number, and I'll call you tomorrow."

After Tyler left I fell asleep feeling happier than I had in a long time.

The next morning, I woke with a slight headache and took a couple of aspirin. Billy's face popped into my mind—finally. I knew I should feel guilty, but I didn't. I asked myself if I really wanted to marry a mama's boy. Suddenly I knew that I didn't love Billy and never had. He happened to come into my life when I was lonely. Settling for second or third best wasn't my style and I knew I still loved Tyler. I decided to tell Billy the truth and break things off with him. It was time. I knew Kylie would be furious, but I was done. Let her

bully someone else. Hopefully my parents could get some of their deposits back, if not I'd work hard to pay them back.

I showered and dressed in my favorite pair of blue jeans and a light blue blouse. I'd just finished brushing my hair and putting on my make-up when the doorbell rang. It was Tyler and he didn't look very happy.

"Why didn't you tell me that you're engaged? Did you find it amusing to have me tell you I still loved you? Were you planning on telling me or were you just playing with me?"

"I'm sorry I didn't tell you, Tyler. I know it was wrong, but I was afraid you'd disappear again."

"Goodbye, Rosemary." Tyler turned and started walking back towards his truck.

"Wait! We need to talk."

He didn't pause for a second, but kept on going. I stood in the doorway until long after he'd sped away.

I moped around my apartment the rest of the day, too depressed to do anything else. I did call and tell Mom and Dad they needed to cancel the wedding plans.

"I'm sorry to do this to you at the last minute."

"No problem, honey. We'd much rather lose a little money than have you in an unhappy marriage."

I gave up on having a productive day, so I called it a night early.

My mind wouldn't let me sleep. All I could think of was Tyler. I was still angry at myself for not telling him. I rose with the sun and hurried to the kitchen to make coffee. I'd decided to tell Billy my decision that morning and get it over with. I didn't look forward to it.

I asked him to meet me in the same little bistro thinking maybe Billy wouldn't throw too big a fit in public. He had a temper and I didn't want to be alone with him when I shared my news. I ordered coffee and told Kimmy I needed some time to talk to Billy without being interrupted. She put me in a corner booth and left me with my cup of coffee. I spooned some sugar in it and waited for Billy to show up.

"What's so important that you had to call me so early? I thought maybe you wanted to go to church with me

and my mother for a change. You know she'll expect it after we're married."

"Sorry, but that's not my plan...to marry you that is. After a sleepless night, I've come to a decision, Billy. I don't think we're suited for each other. Your mother loathes me and I'm not sure I could or would try to change her feelings. You're a nice guy, but I don't want to marry you."

"Are you trying to make me apologize for calling you out on the invitations because I...?"

I cut him off. "No. It's not that. I don't love you, Billy. I can't marry a man I don't love."

Billy's face turned so red I half expected steam to come out his ears. Before things could escalate I got to my feet and set a small box in front of him.

"What's this?" He asked.

"It's the ring. Goodbye, Billy."

I sprinted towards the door leaving Billy at the table with his mouth open. Kimmy held the door open for me.

"Don't worry about the coffee, Rosemary. I've got you covered."

"Thanks. I owe you big time."

"You'd better get going while I go over and try to head Prince Charming off at the pass."

I scurried out the door and into my car. I guess I should have felt bad for hurting Billy's feelings, but all I could do picture Tyler's face. I knew I'd done the right thing and only wished I'd done it earlier.

A month later I was back at the bistro after work. I didn't feel like cooking and always enjoyed Kimmy's friendly face. She and I had spent a few Saturday afternoons recently talking about my romantic affairs—or lack of them. I'd just been seated when I saw Tyler come in with some brunette on his arm. I tried to hide behind the menu, but he spotted me and came over.

"Well if it isn't the newlywed. Why aren't you wearing your wedding ring? Trying to pick up someone else?"

"I called off the wedding."

Tyler looked surprised. "I'm sorry things didn't work out for you."

(Continued on page 52) 7

RESISTING TEMPTATION

A Fling or My Husband?

I opened and closed the book for the fourth time, staring at the handwritten name and phone number on the inside jacket; mixed feelings racked my conscience as I stood alone in the dingy apartment. My husband, Leland was off on another trucking drive, increasing my loneliness which is what made Steven's name and number so inviting. I yearned for the true male companionship that Steven seemed to offer at our first and only encounter.



Wow! A Simple to Use Computer Designed Especially for Seniors!

Easy to read. Easy to see. Easy to use. Just plug it in!



"I love this computer! It is easy to read and to use! I get photo updates from my children and grandchildren all the time."

— Janet F.

Have you ever said to yourself "I'd love to get a computer, if only I could figure out how to use it." Well, you're not alone. Computers were supposed to make our lives simpler, but they've gotten so complicated that they are not worth the trouble. With all of the "pointing and clicking" and "dragging and dropping" you're lucky if you can figure out where you are. Plus, you are constantly worrying about viruses and freeze-ups. If this sounds familiar, we have great news for you. There is finally a computer that's designed for simplicity and ease of use. It's the WOW Computer, and it was designed with you in mind. This computer is easy-to-use, worry-free and literally puts the world at

your fingertips. From the moment you open the box, you'll realize how different the WOW Computer is. The components are all connected; all you do is plug it into an outlet and your high-speed Internet connection. Then you'll see the screen – it's now 22 inches. This is a completely new touch screen system, without the cluttered look of the normal computer screen. The "buttons" on the screen are easy to see and easy to understand. All you do is touch one of them, from the Web, Email, Calendar to Games— you name it... and a new screen opens up. It's so easy to use you won't have to ask your children or grandchildren for help. Until now, the very people who could benefit most from E-mail and the Internet are the ones that have had the hardest time accessing it. Now, thanks to the WOW Computer, countless older Americans are discovering the wonderful world of the Internet every day. Isn't it time

NEW

Now comes with...

Larger 22-inch hi-resolution screen – easier to see
16% more viewing area

Simple navigation – so you never get lost

Intel® processor – lightning fast
Computer is in the monitor – No bulky tower

Advanced audio, Better speaker configuration – easier to hear

Text to Speech translation – it can even read your emails to you!

U.S. Based Customer Service

FREE
Automatic Software Updates

you took part? Call now, and you'll find out why tens of thousands of satisfied seniors are now enjoying their WOW Computers, emailing their grandchildren, and experiencing everything the Internet has to offer. Call today!

- Send & Receive Emails
- Have video chats with family and friends
- Surf the Internet:
Get current weather and news
- Play games Online:
Hundreds to choose from!

Call now toll free and find out how you can get the new WOW! Computer.

Mention promotional code 105874 for special introductory pricing.

1-877-767-5670



Opening the book the fifth time, I thought, *What would be the harm in just calling and talking to the guy?* I picked up the house phone and dialed the cell phone number. I nervously waited for him to answer, wondering what I would say to him. After a few rings, I heard his voice-mail pickup. I hung up without leaving a message, feeling a mixture of disappointment and relief.

A few weeks ago, I had sat in the park while our two-year-old son, Brock played in the sandbox. Leland had just started truck driving school a few blocks from our apartment and the park. I worked part time at a local medical urgent care and as my schedule allowed, we would walk Leland to work and then Brock would play in the park as I read.

One day a man walked up to me and smiled. "Are you Leland's girlfriend?"

I hesitated. *Who is this guy asking questions?*

"I'm Steven Martin," he offered. "Leland and I are trucking school buddies. I've seen you three walking back and forth."

I relaxed a bit since this was a very public place and if I needed help, moms and dads were everywhere. He was very attractive too, and I was flattered with his attention. "I'm his wife, Belle," I said.

He nodded. "Leland's done very well in school. He's at the top of the class."

"Yes, he does talk a lot about it at home. He's very excited about this opportunity. Are you enjoying truck driving?" I surprised myself by asking a question.

He shrugged. "It can be a decent living. I've worked in warehouses as a forklift driver for a few years. I wanted to get out and see more of the open road."

"That can be a lonely life. Won't your wife miss you?" I ventured asking.

Steven smiled. "I'm not married or have a girlfriend at the moment." He glanced around the busy park. "Do you mind if I sit down?"

I slid over a bit, closing my book, trying to keep Leland's trucking school application papers from falling out. He gave them to me

weeks ago to file at home, but they'd stayed in my book.

He sat down, glancing at the book in my hand. "You like to read?" He leaned back, placing an ankle atop his knee.

I shrugged. "Not as often as I'd like. Our son, Brock," I said, pointing, "keeps me busy. I've been working on this book for months," I grinned.

"Do you work or are you going to college?" He asked, squinting in the mid-morning sun.

I sighed. "Both in a way. I took two years of college before Brock, but I had to drop out. I plan on working for another year at the urgent care clinic to afford going back to finish. Leland's trucking career might speed that up though. I'm also going to apply for financial aid again."

"What did you study?"

"Pre-med courses. I want to be a nurse practitioner."

He nodded. "You sound like a smart girl with high ambitions. Are you ready for Leland to be gone for long periods of time?"

"My parents live fairly close; I have my job, and I have a couple of good neighbors. I won't be alone completely," I slowly parroted back what I'd already rationalized. Steven asked the same questions I had asked myself when Leland first approached me about going to trucking school. I had my doubts about being separated, but I'd hoped this would be the answer to our financial problems.

"So, what do you do for fun?" Steven asked, seeming to sense he'd hit a sore spot and changed the subject.

And so we continued to talk, about me and Leland, my parents, and where I was from. He told me about himself. Steven had an easy disposition, a great sense of humor for he quickly got me laughing, something I hadn't done in a long time. He was nice looking, maybe five years older than me. I stole several glances from time to time, watching his lips move and wondered what it would be like to kiss them. Noticing his well-built chest and arms, I wondered what it would

be like to be held in them.

What was I doing? I was married with a young son. I didn't need to be fantasizing about a stranger, however nice and good looking. Steven was relaxed and carefree, the way Leland used to be. Steven asked me questions, personal, caring questions unlike Leland who stopped asking me about my day or Brock's. I tried to tell myself that I was just lonely and in great need of male companionship. We continued to talk with me losing all track of time. All too soon, Brock came running to me, saying he was hungry and wanted lunch.

I gasped when I glanced at my watch. It was past noon. "I'm sorry, Steven, but I have to go. It was nice talking with you," I said standing up.

He grabbed a pen from his pocket and wrote his name and cell number on the inside flap of my book. "Just in case I don't see you again soon. Call me if you ever need to talk." With a smile, he turned and walked away.

That was six weeks ago. Leland graduated and was out on his first professional truck run. While I was proud of his accomplishment, I had never felt lonelier. Leland talked nonstop about his schooling. He never once asked about me or Brock. I didn't feel like I was part of a real couple, but then did I ever in our year and a half of marriage? Steven, for a few hours, made me feel like I mattered. That I was a real person and not just Leland's wife.

Leland and I had had a whirlwind courtship. We met at Spring Break at the beach. We danced and drank, listening to the concerts and watching volleyball tournaments. It was a crazy week, but we enjoyed each other's company, talking and getting to know one another. He was tall and lean with a sharp intelligence. We dated afterwards on weekends while we attended college, but all too soon I discovered that I was pregnant.

Leland was a decent guy. He didn't bail on me once I told him. He offered to marry me, but did I really want him as my life partner? Sure, we had fun together, but was he the one? We were both young and what

did we know about life and love? I couldn't give Leland an answer right away. Dating was one thing, but getting married and having a baby was a complete shock.

I dreaded telling my parents who seemed to have the perfect marriage. They never argued or fought, always getting along. I knew they would be disappointed in me and the situation I got myself into.

My parents made my decision for us when we told them. They didn't just insist, they demanded that we get married. It felt like a shotgun wedding standing before the justice of the peace when I was six months pregnant with my disappointed parents as our witnesses.

Brock arrived soon after we moved into this dingy, little apartment. We were husband and wife, but I felt like we were just two people sharing an apartment and a child. I had never felt so trapped.

Finishing college was out of the question now. I'd lost my scholarship and was forced to find work at an urgent care clinic. Leland dropped out too now that we had three mouths to feed and rent to pay.

Leland worked at a home supply store full time, but we struggled to pay the bills. When this trucking school opportunity came, we thought it would be our ticket to a better life, at least financially anyway.

We stopped talking about everything though. The stress of being forced to grow up and be responsible had driven us apart. We didn't have the money to do fun things like going to the movies or eating out. We were becoming strangers. Our working schedule kept us apart and then I would be tired from watching Brock. Yes, we were husband and wife, sharing a son, but was that enough to hold us together?

Maybe that was why I found Steven so appealing. He had charisma, a spark that Leland had lost by our shotgun wedding. Maybe that was why I yearned to have someone put spice back into my young life.

I called Steven's number several times while Leland was out, but I always got his voice mail. I was too embarrassed to leave a message. Steven never returned my missed

calls. Maybe that was his way of saying he wasn't serious about me. I didn't know how long Steven was out so I made extra trips to the park hoping I might see him again. No matter what, I couldn't force myself to throw away the number. It was my lifeline to hope.

Leland never called me along the route to check up on us or to tell me about his trip. Steven was silent. All I could do was wait for Leland to return to have some type of male companionship, but I couldn't wipe Steven from my mind or stop the

MOVING?

Be sure your subscription to True Story follows you! Please notify us at least six weeks before you move. Send your old and new address to:



TRUE STORY

True Renditions
105 E. 34th St., Suite 141
New York, NY 10016

Or email to:
subscriptions@truerenditionsllc.com

fantasies.

"Do you think you'll like driving trucks across country as a living?" I asked Leland, breaking the ice at dinner when he returned.

He had toyed with his food, being strangely quiet, avoiding conversation. He shrugged. "It can be okay, I guess. It's not all what I thought it would be. I'll make a few more runs to know for sure. The money's good at least. I have to make a trip in two days. I'll be gone for seven days again." His face was void of any emotion.

"Will this be a regular schedule? Gone for a week at a time only to be home a couple of days in between?"

I knew he would have an irregular schedule, taking any job he could for a while to get established, but this would be more than I bargained for.

He shrugged again. "Maybe."

I wasn't too disappointed. Maybe I could actually reach Steven this time or catch him at the park. Just because I was homebound didn't mean I couldn't have some excitement between Brock and my job. I was feeling less and less married now.

The day after Leland left for his truck run, I took Brock to the park, hoping to see Steven. This time I was rewarded.

He came out of nowhere, plopping down on the bench next to me. "Hello, pretty lady!"

The same laughing brown eyes greeted me. Without thinking, I leaned over and hugged him. "So good to see you again! I called you several times, but I could never reach you."

He returned my hug with an awkward smile.

"They had me driving in some pretty remote areas to where I couldn't get phone service. I thought about calling you back, but I didn't want to make things sticky with you and Leland."

I nodded, just glad to see him and be close to him. "Did you just get home?"

"Yesterday. I have to go back out tomorrow." He waved some papers. "I'll be on the road a lot which is what I wanted." He glanced around. "Leland out again?"

"Yes, he left yesterday and won't be back for a week."

Steven jumped up. "It's early and I don't want to sit down any more than I have to. How about we go down to the fair at the beach and walk around and talk?"

"Good idea," I said smiling. "It's time for Brock's morning nap. I'll get my neighbor to watch him for a few hours."

The three of us walked the five blocks to my house, talking all the way, catching up like old friends, something Leland and I didn't do anymore. At my apartment, I discovered that my neighbor wasn't home.

(Continued on page 56) 11

APRIL SHOWERS

Washing Away Regret

“Looks like April Showers!” a craft fair vendor exclaimed. “We better close up.”

On reflex, I glanced up at the dark puckering clouds forming in the west. There’s still time to peruse for a few more minutes before everybody closes up shop. It had started out to be a brisk, spring sunny day, but as everybody knows the weather is tricky this time of year. It likes to lull you into a false sense of security and then in a blink it changes.

FIND
MORE
FREE
MAGAZINES

FREEMAGS.CC

Finally... A scooter that loads itself in and out of your car.

Introducing the Quingo® Flyte - the powerful, portable mobility scooter that you never have to lift. Now featuring patented 5-Wheel Anti-Tip Technology.

It's a sad fact. Many people who have mobility issues and could benefit from a scooter aren't able to use them away from home. Struggling to get it into a car or loading it onto a bumper-mounted lift just isn't worth the effort. Now, there's a better scooter, the Quingo® Flyte. It's easy to use, even for one person, and requires no more effort than closing a car's tailgate. Clever design enables it to fit into SUV's, mini-vans, crossovers and hatchbacks.

Quingo® Flyte can load and unload itself in less than 60 seconds using an innovative ramp and a simple remote. The built-in guide rails can be

Only one scooter is this powerful and portable

- Patented 5-Wheel Stability™ by Quingo takes you almost anywhere.
- No dismantling or lifting of heavy scooter parts.
- Fits most SUV's, mini-vans, crossovers and hatchbacks.
- Large motor + up to 350 pound capacity.
- Extra long range with BIG scooter performance.
- Won't bounce around in your car- locks in place.



"For the first time in years I've been able to go with my granddaughters to the mall. A crowd gathers every time I unload my scooter from my car!"

– Judi K, Exeter, CA

installed in minutes and safely direct your scooter to ground level.

This scooter provides 5-Wheel Anti-Tip Technology for stability, agility and comfort with its unique wheel configuration. The patented 5-wheel Bumpmaster™ design by Quingo enables it to ride safely over a wide variety of surfaces. It uses 4 ultra slim powerful batteries providing a range of up to 23 miles on a single charge.

The best selling auto-loading scooter in Europe is now available in the US! Don't wait to take advantage of this exciting new technology, call today to find out more.

Quingo flyte

featuring 5-Wheel Anti-Tip Technology

Call now toll free for our lowest price.

1-888-346-5997

See it in action at www.QuingoUSA.com

Please mention code 105873 when ordering.

© 2017 firstSTREET for Boomers and Beyond, Inc.

Wrapping my duster sweater a little tighter around my chest against the rising breeze, I kept walking, meandering booth to booth, admiring handcrafted jewelry, braided rugs, flower arrangements, wood craft, and the like. I wasn't looking for anything in particular to buy, for what I truly wanted couldn't be bought at a county craft fair.

What my heart truly yearned for was a happy family. The kind of family I never had growing up. A family with parents who deeply loved each other and loved and protected their children. I thought I had found that twenty years ago when I married Taylor.

Taylor had literally swept me off my feet. I was at a modeling shoot for shampoo and Taylor was the photographer's assistant. His smile and five-o'clock shadow captivated me from the start and gave me the inspiration to do my modeling best. After two hours of smiling and twirling and flipping my long golden brown hair under those hot bright lights, I was exhausted.

"You look like you could use a drink," Taylor said, holding out some bottled water.

"Thanks, you're a life saver," I said unscrewing the cap and taking a huge swig.

"My name's Taylor Connors."

"Mae McCann."

"Is this your first modeling gig?"

I shook my head. "This is my first here, but I've done a few others around the city. I'm taking art classes at the art institute, but I do modeling right now to pay the bills."

He nodded. "I thought as much. You handled this session like a pro. Renaldo shoots a lot of young models and I can tell he appreciated your talent and energy. He rarely works with inexperienced models."

"Thanks. I enjoy it. It's fun and pays well, but I want to be a painter one day. Hopefully in a few more years I can be featured in an art gallery."

"Cool." He glanced at his watch. "We're breaking for lunch. Care to grab a bite with me?"

I smiled. "Yes, I'd like that."

Taylor took me out several times after that for the next year and a half. I continued to model and take as many art classes as I could. Sometimes the shoots conflicted with my classes and other times, I was too exhausted to attend, but I kept up with my projects and graduated. I applied to art galleries, showing my art samples, but no one took me seriously. They kept telling me to stick with modeling, but I refused to give up.

Eventually, Taylor branched out and started his own photography studio. We went to dinner to celebrate his success.

That night he proposed and I accepted. Three months later with a grand wedding with all the bells and whistles, we were husband and wife. I knew we'd have the fairy tale marriage come true that I'd always dreamed of. Soon we'd have children and I would have a full family to complete my perfect life.

Before long I was pregnant and too round to model. We didn't go out as often, which I didn't mind as I set up the nursery and took lots of naps. I also used this time to paint and apply for art gallery jobs, but nobody wanted to hire a pregnant woman. I was disappointed, but I comforted myself with the thought that maybe the time wasn't right yet and that I just needed to be patient and build up a portfolio.

We had Arthur and I was content to be a mom and a wife. By the time Arthur was walking, I was pregnant again. I spent my days taking care of my family and dabbling in painting at home, but I quickly realized that there was no time for my personal interests so I set them aside for my family's sake. Elma joined our family shortly. I felt so blessed to have my loving husband and beautiful children, the family I prayed for. I wouldn't have traded them for the world.

A couple of months later, I worked extra hard to get my modeling body back in shape after having two kids. I contacted my old agent and soon landed several shoots after a two-and-a-half-year

break. Not only did I do magazine shoots, but I started doing TV commercials. My life was full, but I made time for my family. We had family meals together. I read them bedtime stories every night. We attended all their school meetings, plays and ballgames. We took family vacations to theme parks and went camping and canoeing. And Taylor and I made special romantic times for each other. I think we were like a family out of a Hallmark greeting card. And things were perfect for over ten years.

With the children getting older and into their own interests, I felt the time was finally right and returned to painting and began to actively pursue employment in galleries again. Even though I enjoyed my successful modeling career, I knew there was a time limit on my looks. I was getting older. It was time for a transition. I turned to my first love—my art. I felt more alive when I was creating works of art with paint, seeing people and objects coming to life. I began to discover a new me. I guess that's when my home life changed.

Then one day Taylor came home and made his announcement. "I'm leaving Mae. I can't do this anymore and I want out."

I was speechless as I watched Taylor pack up a suitcase and walk out the door with only a brief goodbye to the kids. I ran sobbing to the bedroom, asking myself, "Why wasn't I good enough to be loved? Where did I go wrong? I'd failed at love. I'd failed to keep my family together. Have I failed my children too?"

I was devastated. For the next several months, I couldn't eat. I couldn't sleep. I couldn't even pray. I lost modeling contracts and sank into a mild depression. Reflectively in my dark haze, I realized that Taylor had never supported my painting. "Finger painting," he called them. I had always thought he was just joking in a loving way. During my golden modeling years, he always seemed proud to show me off to his social circle, like a prize filly, but lately, we hadn't attended any functions as a couple.

Was he moving on to younger pastures?

I managed to take care of Arthur and Elma's physical needs, but not their emotional ones. I could barely function myself. I had no answer for their father's desertion. He called a few times to talk to them and he even stopped by one time, but they didn't want much to do with him and I didn't blame them.

At the divorce proceedings, I learned that Taylor was dating one of his models and they were planning to marry shortly after ours was final. My worst fears were realized. I wasn't worthy to be loved.

Call it a moment of retaliation or temporary insanity, I drove home and pulled up my list of friends on social media. Flipping through the names, I reached out to one of my high school boyfriends that was still single, Meyers Reynolds, and asked him out. He responded immediately saying yes.

Three months later, I proposed to him and we were married by the Justice of the Peace. Arthur and Elma were confused by the sudden whirlwind marriage and new stepdad, but they went with it. They were dealing with a new step-mom as well. I never stopped to consult with them before I proposed to Meyers. I was too wrapped up in my own emotions to get them counseling to deal with all these family changes. I just reacted to my own hurt and betrayal and lost dreams, thinking that two wrongs would make everything right. I was so desperate to recapture my romantic ideal of a family that I didn't take the time to really get to know the man my childhood friend Meyers had become. Five months later, the marriage was over.

Shocked to my senses with two divorces, I knew I needed professional counseling, as well as my children. With help of friends, I sought out a good therapist. Very quickly she honed in on my biggest unresolved issues: my parents.

I was six years old. I remembered my parents signing some papers and then my dad packed his bags and left. I didn't really understand it

at the time. Back then people didn't think to get children counseling to help them deal with those kinds of family issues. You were just supposed to deal with it. So, I didn't cry. I tried to be brave and strong.

Even as young as I was, I knew my mom was fragile. She wasn't able to take care of me or my older sister, Dana, because she was an alcoholic and the divorce only added to her addiction. Dana did most of the cooking and household chores. She made sure I did my homework. I helped out whenever I could, like washing dishes while standing on a step stool. At fifteen Dana got a part-time job working as a cashier in a local grocery store.

Dad remarried a couple of years later and Dana and I went to go live with him and his new wife. Things got better. We had full time parents again and we got to be normal kids with normal lives. We visited Mom on weekends throughout the year, but they were always depressing visits. Her house was unkempt and she looked worn down and lost.

One day less than two years later, Dad picked us up from school with our suitcases in the backseat. "I'm taking you back to live with your mother. This isn't working out." He didn't give any further explanation and I didn't dare ask for one. His tone discouraged any discussion. Dana and I clasped each other's hand and exchanged glum glances. My dad and step-mom had a baby boy six months ago, and maybe Dad couldn't handle raising us girls along with an infant.

As a parent now myself, I understand that he must have had his reasons. Reasons that had a lot more to do with him than with us, but that didn't make this rejection any easier. And that's what I felt: utterly rejected by my mom and now my dad. What had I done wrong? Why wasn't I good enough to stay with my dad and his new family? Why wasn't I good enough to be loved?

Right then and there I promised myself that when I grew up, I would find a husband who loved me for

me. We'd have children and we'd all love each other no matter what.

Dana graduated high school not long later and left for a job in the city. Since it was just me at home now, my mom and I grew closer, but on many occasions her drinking got in the way. Our mother-daughter roles were reversed. For several years, I took care of her while I watched her struggle to hold on to jobs. It tore me apart to see her this way with no one to help her. I kept hoping that if I helped more around the house, the less she would drink. I didn't dare invite my friends over since I was never sure what state she would be in. By doing so, I felt more isolated and alone.

One of the few solaces was my art class at school. My art teacher said I showed promise after she saw several of my sketches. She encouraged me to attend an art institute after high school. Many nights I'd lie awake in bed, asking myself if a normal life was even possible for someone like me. I knew Mom couldn't afford college tuition and Dad seemed more distant than ever with his new family. But I still dreamed.

As soon as I was old enough, I got a part-time job at a fast food restaurant. Besides doing the housework and almost nightly putting my mom to bed after one of her drinking binges, this was another way I could help by contributing to the living expenses.

One day a local modeling agent came into the restaurant and gave me her card. "I think you have a real future. Come by and we'll talk and see about building up a portfolio." I was stunned. I had never given my looks much thought. I'd always had more grown-up things to focus on, but I wanted to give it a shot. Maybe modeling would be another distraction from my home rejection and loneliness. And maybe I could earn enough money to send myself to art school. For the first time, I felt a spark of hope a sense of acceptance and belonging.

After work, I tried to tell my mom about this modeling opportunity, but all I received were glazed eyes

(Continued on page 48) 15

Wedding Day **DISASTER** Our Nasty Nuptials



*M*y mother-in-law-to-be was a perfectionist. She never had a hair out of place and everything in her house was just so. I knew I could never live up to her standards, but Dewey didn't seem to care. He loved me just as I was—a hot mess of insecurity and disorganization. Even so, I was surprised when he proposed one Saturday afternoon, dropping to one knee in the middle of the bookstore where we'd first met.

Of course, I said yes.

Then everything got real.

Covered by **MEDICARE**
and suffering from
BACK or KNEE PAIN?



RELIEVE YOUR PAIN NOW!

at little or **no cost!**

Call 24/7 **800-619-7308**

Learn for FREE how a Back or Knee Brace can help



Fast and Easy **Medicare**
Approvals

Free Nationwide Shipping

**Give Your Back or Knee
the Support & Relief
It Needs and Reduce
Your Pain**

We have other braces available too, for
your shoulder, neck, ankle and back.

800-619-7308

As he slipped the engagement ring on my finger, my thoughts swirled in a million directions at once. We had to pick a wedding date, confirm the availability of Dewey's minister, find a venue for the reception, and do so many other things that I had given little thought to prior to that moment, including announcing our betrothal to our parents.

Once I realized that, I said, "We should tell my father first."

"He already knows."

"Already knows? How can he?"

Dewey smiled. "He doesn't know your answer, but he knows I was planning this," he said. "I asked his permission."

"That's so old-fashioned."

"But it was the right thing to do. He gave me his blessing," my fiancé said. Then he added, "He also said that if I ever break your heart he'll break my legs. I hope he was joking."

My father can be intimidating—he's a thick-bodied muscular man with graying black hair worn in a ponytail and tattoos covering both arms, much of his back, and one small spot on his chest where he has my mother's name tattooed over his heart—but he's never been violent. Instead of reassuring Dewey of my father's teddy bear-like qualities, I said, "Your mother's the one I'm afraid of. I'm not sure she likes me. She's always making snide comments about how disorganized I am."

"But you are disorganized. You tell me so all the time."

"Well, I'll prove your mother wrong. Our wedding is too important to screw up."

Even though I had been working full-time since graduating college, I didn't earn enough at the community theater to rent my own place, so I still lived with my father and knew he would be home.

He was sitting in his black leather recliner, drinking a beer and watching concert footage of some power trio that recorded four albums in the late 1960s before breaking up. He muted the television's sound when I said we had something to tell him.

I stuck my left hand in my father's

face, showing him the diamond solitaire Dewey had given me. "We're engaged."

"About time. You two have been mooning at each other for months now," my father said. He pushed himself out of the recliner and shook Dewey's hand. "Remember what I told you."

"Yes, sir," Dewey said. "I will."

"You two set a date yet?"

We looked at each other.

"June?" I said.

"Sure," Dewey said. "Why not?"

"My baby girl's all grown up now." My father pulled me into his arms and we hugged. When he finally released me, he said, "You plan to wear your mother's dress?"

My mother died when I was in the third grade, and her wedding dress still hung in my father's bedroom closet. "Of course. I wouldn't have it any other way."

He nodded. "You let me know if I need to do anything."

"I will," I said, and then I corrected myself. "We will."

Telling Dewey's mother and father was far more stressful. When Dewey told his parents we had news for them, his mother insisted we sit at the dining room table. We coupled off, with them on one side and Dewey and me on the other. Looking at them across the table I was reminded once again of how different they were from my father. Instead of a black T-shirt and jeans like my father, Mr. Winchester wore a yellow polo shirt and tan chinos. He had his hair trimmed short, and a pair of gold wire-frame glasses perched on his nose. Mrs. Winchester was dressed much the same, in white slacks and a pink oxford shirt with the sleeves rolled up to reveal the gold bangles on her left wrist. Her auburn hair had been styled into a straight bob with bangs and highlighted to mask any gray that might have been lurking among her tresses. Even though it was a Saturday, she'd done her make-up as if she had plans for later in the day.

"So what's the news?" Dewey's mother asked as she turned from looking at her son to staring at me.

"You aren't pregnant, are you?"

Before I could respond with anything more than a surprised look, Dewey showed his parents the ring on my left hand. "We're engaged."

Mrs. Winchester continued staring at me, awaiting the answer to her question.

"No," I said. "I'm not."

"Okay, then," she said. "That's good news."

"Congratulations," Dewey's father said, but I wasn't quite certain if he was congratulating us on our engagement or me on not being pregnant.

"Have you set a date?"

We had discussed it on the drive from my father's house. Dewey said, "The last Saturday in June."

"That's only ten months away," his mother said. "You have a lot to do before then. Have you confirmed availability of the church? You are marrying in our church, aren't you? And what about—?"

"Slow down, Mom," Dewey said. "We've only been engaged a few hours. Like you said, we have ten months to figure all this out."

"The time will disappear in a flash," his mother said. "If you don't start lining things up now—"

"Mom," Dewey insisted. "Take a deep breath. Let us enjoy our moment."

Mr. Winchester put his hand on his wife's forearm, and that seemed to calm her down.

"Congratulations," she finally said, but I was unsure how sincere she was because the smile she wore didn't quite reach her eyes.

The next several months were overwhelming. My father was the go-to guy to repair a motorcycle, build a house, or discuss old rock 'n' roll groups, but, despite his best efforts, he wasn't much help with girly things. He had done the best he could, quitting his night job and taking a day job after my mother's death so he could raise me. He had guided me through my teen years and through early adulthood, even though he didn't really understand what it was like to be female and all the changes my body went through. So, I searched the Internet, found a

list of things to do and when to do them while planning a wedding, and used it as my roadmap.

I had some savings and my father was able to help some, but I had to do everything on a limited budget. Dewey made it clear that his parents were willing to help with the expenses, but I was loath to ask for their assistance. I didn't want them thinking I was marrying him because of their money. So, I scrimped, I saved, I negotiated, and I managed to put everything together.

After taking in the bustline and letting out the hips, I was able to wear my mother's wedding dress. My bridesmaids found matching dresses on the discount rack at a bridal shop, and Dewey and his groomsmen used coupons to reduce the cost of their tuxedo rentals. Because Dewey and his family were members of the church, there was no charge for its use, and Dewey was responsible for providing an appropriate gift to the minister for his services.

The only reception hall we could afford located within a reasonable distance of the church wasn't even open for business when we signed the rental agreement. A former auto parts warehouse was being repurposed and my father was one of the carpenters involved in the finishing work. He and the owners swore it would be ready in time, and we would be the first people to use it.

There was no way to scrimp on the sit-down dinner my mother-in-law insisted we have, so we hired one of the better catering companies and, other than providing champagne for the toast, opted for a cash bar to keep alcohol expenses negligible. The daughter of one of my father's co-workers had recently opened her own studio, and for a discount we agreed to let her use photos from our wedding in her advertising. We hired a band that had never performed at a wedding because Dewey was a friend of the lead guitarist's younger brother and my father approved of the band's audition CD. My father made a list of songs the band needed to learn to ensure there was

music for everyone to enjoy.

Dewey and I had dinner with his parents a week before the wedding. By then I had finalized all the details and was feeling pretty good about our wedding plans.

Over Caesar salad, lasagna, and garlic bread, Mrs. Winchester asked about my father. "I think we should know something about him before we meet at the rehearsal. What's he do?"

"He's a carpenter now," I said.

Mrs. Winchester gave her son a look I couldn't decipher, but it certainly looked like disappointment. Both of Dewey's parents had college degrees and worked white collar office jobs. "Now?"

"I don't know what my father did before my mother died. He won't talk about it. He just tells me he gave up his dream to make certain I never have to give up mine. Whatever he did, he worked nights, mostly on weekends."

"And he's never told you what his dream was?" Mr. Winchester asked.

I shook my head.

"What about you?" Dewey asked his parents. "Did you give up your dreams when you had me?"

"We gave up our dreams long before you were born," his mother said. "We had to make practical decisions, much like Lydia's father."

"You were in drama club, weren't you, Mom?"

"I was never going to be an actress."

"But that was your dream, wasn't it?"

"Your mother was pretty good," his father said.

"But I was better with numbers," she said, "so I became an accountant."

Dewey started to ask, "Do you ever wish—?"

"No," she said, cutting him off. "Never. Not once."

I had earned my degree in public relations and worked for the community theater. I reminded Mrs. Winchester of that and added, "I can give you advance notice the next time they have an open casting call."

She gave me a look that ended

that line of conversation, and we all ate in silence until Mr. Winchester asked Dewey when he needed to pick up his tux.

After dinner, Dewey took me back to his apartment, a one-bedroom second-floor walk-up that we would soon be sharing full-time. I had already moved some of my things in, and the place no longer had a bachelor pad vibe.

My fiancé opened a beer, and at my insistence gave me a bottle of water and settled onto the couch next to me. Despite having my mother's wedding gown altered to better fit my wider hips, I worried that I had been stress eating since the alterations were completed and I vowed, despite having seconds at dinner, to starve myself for the rest of the week to ensure that I fit in the dress.

As I opened the water bottle, I said, "Your mother doesn't like me, does she?"

"Why do you think that?"

"She doesn't want you to marry me," I said. "She thinks you can do better, doesn't she?"

"She's never said anything like that. Not once."

"The way she looks at me sometimes makes me feel like something the cat drug in."

"My mother's hard on everyone." Dewey put his beer on the coffee table, wrapped one arm around me, and pulled me close. "Including herself."

"But—"

"Don't let her get to you," he said. He brushed a lock of hair away from my eyes. "She'll loosen up when she gets to know you better."

"She's had almost two years!"

"Yeah, and it's taken her twenty-seven years to get to know me!"

The absurdity of what he said made me laugh, and for the first time in several days I actually felt some of the stress melt away. I snuggled up against my husband-to-be, absolutely certain that he was the one for me.

My father and Dewey's parents met for the first time at the rehearsal. Mr. and Mrs. Winchester

(Continued on page 51) 19

Our Summer Staycation

**I Don't Need
Luxury for Fun!**



I was fizzing with excitement as I waited for Ricky, my husband, to get home from work. We'd left it right to the last minute, but I'd booked our summer vacation! My mind raced as I went into the kitchen to check on dinner. I'd need a bikini, a few casual sundresses, and an evening dress, oh, and sandals: strappy, high-heeled sandals. The front door opened and I couldn't stop a huge grin from breaking out on my face.

"In here, sweetheart!" I called out. "I hope you're hungry!"

Even after two years I still wasn't used to being married to the most handsome man in the world, and my heart skipped a beat when my dark-haired husband walked into the kitchen and gave me a kiss.

A Help Button Should Go Where You Go!

To be truly independent your personal emergency device needs to work on the go.

"Hello, this is MobileHelp. How may I assist you?"

MobileHelp

Traditional Help Buttons

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	At Home	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	In the Car	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	On a Walk	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	On Vacation	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	At the Park	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Shopping	<input type="checkbox"/>

Stop paying for a help button that **ONLY** works at home!
Call today and set yourself FREE!

As seen on:



MobileHelp

1-855-893-9223

No Contracts, No Hidden Fees, No Risk
Nationwide GPS Location Detection • 24/7/365 Emergency Response Center

\$29⁹⁵
 Value



Order Now & Receive a FREE Lockbox!

Place your door key in this box so that emergency personnel can get help to you even faster.



FDA Registered

Optional Fall Button™



*Service availability and access/coverage on the AT&T network is not available everywhere and at all times. Fall Button™ does not detect 100% of falls. If able, users should always push their help button when they need assistance. Current GPS location may not always be available in every situation. MobileHelp is a registered trademark and Fall Button is a trademark of MobileHelp. Patented technology. NBC, CBS News, The Early Show and The New York Times are registered trademarks. The use of the logos does not imply endorsement of MobileHelp from those organizations. MobileHelp is a FDA registered Medical Device Manufacturer MHP-00624E

Straightening up, he smiled down at me, a suspicious look in his brown eyes. "What's up?"

Darn! I'd never been able to keep anything from him! I'd hoped to keep the news until after we'd eaten, but now I knew that wouldn't be possible.

"Nothing much," I giggled. "I just booked us two weeks in a luxury Hawaiian resort, that's all!"

He froze. "Penny, please tell me you're kidding."

"Well, no, I'm not kidding," I said, confused by how serious he looked. "We always said we wanted to go to Hawaii and I knew if I didn't snap up this deal it wouldn't last."

Ricky slowly shook his head. "We can't afford this—I thought you understood our situation."

"But we can easily cover this!" I said.

"The business is just getting off the ground!" he snapped. "We can't blow thousands of dollars and take two weeks off to play in the sun!"

"Fine!" Tears filled my eyes. "Forget it, okay? We have twenty-four hours to cancel."

I was praying he'd take me in his arms and apologize, tell me we could swing it after all and he was just being over cautious, but Ricky just nodded, and I knew he was serious.

"I'm going to take a shower," he said, and stomped upstairs.

Feeling like a popped balloon, I went online and cancelled our vacation. I knew I needed to be grateful for all the things we did have, and I was. Eighteen months ago, Ricky had lost his job when the computer firm he'd worked for downsized. We'd been lucky to hang onto our house. It was a blow we really hadn't seen coming, but between our savings and my job as a kindergarten teacher we managed. About a year ago Ricky and a friend secured a business loan and started their own computer repair business, and it was really starting to take off. I thought we could relax and start enjoying life again.

I loved Ricky so much, but our marriage was so different from what I'd expected. It was much harder, if I was honest. I saw so little of him and the cheerful, fun-loving guy I'd married often seemed to disappear

completely, replaced by a serious, worried man who hardly noticed me.

By the time Ricky emerged from the shower in fresh jeans and a T-shirt, I'd set the table and laid out the salad and chicken seasoned just the way he liked. But my smile was forced and the last thing I felt like was eating.

"I know you're disappointed, Penny," he said softly. "And I'm sorry."

"I thought we were back on our feet again," I said.

"We're doing good, but the period of time I spent out of work was a setback," he helped himself to chicken and salad. "There's still a substantial amount of the bank loan to pay off, plus the money I borrowed from my folks."

"But everyone has loans these days, Ricky," I argued. "We'll get them paid off."

"Our monthly expenses are huge," he replied. "Let's build our savings up a bit more before we go away on a fancy vacation, huh?"

"Okay," I sighed.

"Plus I really can't afford to take two weeks away from the business and leave it all to Adam, not at this point," he added.

I sighed again at the mention of Adam, Ricky's stodgy, serious business partner. He probably saw more of my husband than I did!

"I can take about a week off," Ricky said. "Why don't we have one of those 'staycations' people talk about?"

"And do what?"

Ricky chewed thoughtfully on a mouthful of chicken. "When we moved here we talked about all the things there were close by—museums and restaurants—but we're always so busy we never go out."

"True—but would I really have you all to myself?" I asked. "Or would staying in town mean Adam sucking you into work issues every day?"

"I promise I'll be all yours for a whole week," Ricky grinned, placing his hand on his heart. "No work, no checking emails, nothing. We'll have the most fun staycation ever, and you'll forget Hawaii ever crossed your mind!"

I highly doubted that, but I forced

a smile. "Okay," I said, giving up. "A staycation it is."

As it was Ricky's idea, I left the planning of our 'staycation' all to him. I still wasn't crazy about the idea, but I was determined to put a brave face on my disappointment. I knew I was lucky—I had a job I loved working with kids, and I was married to the man of my dreams. We lived in a beautiful house in a great neighborhood. So what if we weren't jetting off to some exotic location this summer?

After school was out I spent the first few weeks in June enjoying sleeping in and seeing friends. One afternoon I caught up with Carla, one of my oldest friends, a successful realtor married to a wealthy businessman. She stood and hugged me close when I arrived at the restaurant where we'd arranged to meet for lunch. It was a beautiful day and we sat outside, so we could enjoy the sunshine. I suddenly felt so carefree.

"Are you having a good summer? Enjoying your break from all those little munchkins?" Carla laughed.

We ordered and Carla began to chat about the Caribbean cruise she and her husband were going on in a few weeks. They'd be stopping at several tropical islands along the way. I nodded, smiling. "Oh, it sounds wonderful!"

"When do you and Ricky leave for Hawaii?"

My smile faded. "We're not, actually. Turns out we can't really afford it."

Carla stared at me. "But I thought the business was doing well!"

Our food arrived and I nodded miserably as I shook out my napkin. "It is, but Ricky thinks we need to be careful for a while longer."

"Oh, does he now?" Carla sounded cross. "Well, I'm sorry, Penny, but I think you deserve a decent break. So, if you're not going to Hawaii, where are you going?"

"We're having a staycation." I tried to make my voice light and jokey, but couldn't quite pull it off.

My friend frowned. "A what?"

As I explained, Carla shook her head in disbelief. "So basically you hang out at home and maybe go on

a few cheap day trips?”

I nodded, wishing we could change the subject. I felt like we were criticizing Ricky and that made me feel uncomfortable. “Can we talk about something else?”

“I just have one more thing to say,” Carla said in her forthright way, pointing her fork at me. “You deserve better than this, Penny Jenkins. That husband of yours needs to be putting you first—not his darn business.”

I couldn’t get Carla’s words out of my mind that night as I lay in bed. As usual, my husband was still up, going over business stuff on the phone with his partner. Tears filled my eyes and I groped for a tissue on the nightstand and wiped them away. Over and over again, I’d told myself how lucky I was, having such a hardworking and conscientious husband. But the truth was, I didn’t feel very lucky.

As a dating couple, we’d been inseparable. Each day held its share of magic and romance as we explored the world together, taking trips and eating at new restaurants. There’d been times I’d caught a hint of the serious man Ricky could be—he’d told me it was his dream to start his own business someday and how that would involve a lot of hard work. But I guess I’d thought he meant someday in the far-off future, and I’d never dreamed it would be like this. I was lonelier than ever before in my life. In my single days, I’d lived across town closer to Carla and some other friends, and at least twice a week we’d met up for a meal or a trip to the movies. Everything was so different now. I loved my husband, but there were times I missed my old life so much.

I heard Ricky’s footsteps on the stairs and closed my eyes. He entered the bedroom and as he climbed into bed, he whispered to me, “hon? Are you awake? Are you all ready for our staycation to start in the morning?”

I wanted to yell—*No, I am not! I want a proper vacation, like we used to have!* But instead, I just pretended to be fast asleep.

The following morning I woke to the delicious smell of coffee and

bacon. I showered quickly, then dressed in jeans and a simple T-shirt—I had no idea what Ricky had planned for us, but I didn’t imagine it would be anything fancy. Down in the kitchen the table was set, and Ricky was grinning as he served me up a plate of hot hash browns, bacon and scrambled egg, then poured me a big cup of coffee. He looked relaxed and handsome and in spite of everything I couldn’t help smiling back.

“So, what are we doing today?” I asked.

“I thought we’d try out the art museum,” he replied.

A fresh wave of disappointment crashed through me, but I tried to keep my expression neutral. I’d last visited the museum years ago, when I was in middle school, patiently plodding in and out of drafty rooms to look at paintings of fields and vases of flowers. I’d never returned, and I had no wish to.

“They have this new exhibition,” Ricky said enthusiastically. “Romance in Photography—I thought we’d both get a kick out of it.”

“Sounds good,” I nodded. Photographs with a romantic theme did sound a little more interesting than old paintings, but I’d still have preferred to be soaking up the summer sunshine on a tropical beach.

“Let’s get going,” Ricky said. “We can beat the crowds.”

Thirty minutes later we arrived outside our destination, and I was surprised to find that the chilly old brick mansion I remembered from my childhood days was now only a small part of the museum—a large, modern building rose up beside it. Crowds of school kids milled around outside, but as Ricky had already purchased tickets for the exhibition online we didn’t have to wait. Inside, the museum was vibrant and welcoming, with a cafe and a gift shop. Hand in hand, Ricky and I wandered through the display of photographs.

I hadn’t expected to be impressed, but I was. I guess I’d expected pictures of weddings and flowers, but it seemed everyone had their own view of romance. One photograph showed a very old couple

seated on a bench in a park holding hands. The look in their eyes went beyond words. Another showed a messy family room strewn with toys and baby equipment. Beyond the family room an exhausted looking mom prepared a meal, smiling at her husband, who was cradling a tiny baby. The look in her eyes said so much.

“These are beautiful,” I whispered.

Ricky squeezed my hand. “Do you have a favorite?”

“This one, I think,” I said, gazing at a black and white photograph of an avenue of trees towering over a curving path. A couple walked up the path together, only visible from behind. Her head lay on his shoulder. For some reason this one brought tears to my eyes.

I thought we’d head straight home when we left the museum, but Ricky lingered outside the large doors, scanning the parking lot. A car pulled up and a man hopped out.

“Ricky Jenkins?” he called.

My husband nodded and hurried over and I watched, bewildered, as the man handed him a wicker basket before driving off.

“Are you hungry?” Ricky smiled. “I thought we could have a picnic.”

“That sounds perfect!”

We found a quiet spot under a tree in the park that adjoined the museum and Ricky opened the basket. It contained everything two people needed to take a summer picnic; a blanket to spread on the grass, tiny fresh salmon sandwiches, cheese and gourmet crackers, a cream cake, fruit salad and glasses to drink chilled juice from. Suddenly I realized there wasn’t anywhere in the world I’d rather be than right here, nibbling sandwiches under a tree with my husband, while he looked at me as if I was the most beautiful woman in the world.

“I had no idea I’d enjoy myself so much today,” I told him.

“Yeah, I thought you looked less than thrilled this morning when I said we were going to the museum!” he laughed, then grew serious and took my hand. “I’m glad you’ve enjoyed yourself today, honey. It’s been kind of fun, hasn’t it?”

(Continued on page 54) 23

JOIN FORCES IN JUNE

Reunited to Save our Family

“So you see Meryl, we don’t have a choice.”

No, I supposed we didn’t. I heard the deep concern in my ex-husband, Perry’s voice coming through loud and clear on the other end of the phone.

“We need to put a plan of action together,” he said. “We need to get Gayle. Now.”

I felt my stomach twist. The weatherman had predicted a lovely June day but suddenly I felt cold as ice as if storm clouds had moved in. By agreeing with Perry, I was acknowledging that we were going to betray our son, Barrett. I was admitting that he was not fit to parent his daughter and furthermore she was in danger while in his care. It was a decision that would completely sever my (and Perry’s) ties with our son but just might save the life of a little girl that meant the world to us.



Get Your Book Published With page publishing

The most trusted all-in-one
book publisher

- Titles published in print & digital formats
- Exciting cover & interior illustrations
- International distribution
- Customized publicity campaigns
- Books sold at major retailers



Call today for
your **Free** Author
Submission Kit!

Call 1-800-470-7198

And at just three years old, she certainly wasn't able to fend for herself. I found myself in a situation where no mother ever wants to be: forced to choose between her child and that now grown child's own baby.

"I agree, Perry," I said softly.

"I can come by your place after work to discuss our next steps," he said. "Unless you'd feel more comfortable in a public place?"

"No, of course not," I said. "The house will be fine. See you then."

Your place. The house. It used to be our place, our house. Our home. I never thought life would be like this for us. I glanced at the clock and checked the hour.

As I got ready, I couldn't help but think about how this all came to be. Our story began like a modern-day fairy tale. From the moment I met Perry Connor, I knew that he was my prince and we were going to live happily ever after. We started out that way. We had two beautiful babies, both boys, Maxon and Barrett, and, for a while, life was great. Perry had an excellent job and I found my calling in raising our sons. Secretly, Perry and I always wished for a baby girl to complete our family but it wasn't meant to be.

When the boys reached high school, I found part-time work at the local library and began to notice changes in Barrett. They were slight at first. He was back talking and sneaking out late at night. Perry and I reprimanded him but nothing seemed to work to change his attitude. We found out from Maxon that Barrett had begun to hang out with a bad crowd at school and his behavior only got worse. The school's administration team informed us that Barrett had been cutting school and starting fights. Then came the day that I found drugs in Barrett's sock drawer while putting away some laundry.

I called Perry and he rushed home from work. We had always stressed a very strict "anti-alcohol, anti-drugs" policy with the boys. Instead of being remorseful or trying out excuses like "I was holding them for a friend", Barrett was enraged at us. He accused me of

snooping and screamed at Perry and me. When Barrett tried to push me down the stairs and rushed at his father, Maxon ran to another room and called the police. Neither Perry nor I wanted to press charges against our own child, but the police said that charges from the state against our boy were going to be filed no matter what. Barrett never forgave us for that.

Perry and I had several talks and tried many attempts to straighten Barrett out. We tried behavior rehab centers, "scared straight" programs, religious youth camps and everything else. Nothing worked.

As one might be able to understand, all of this put a tremendous pressure on our marriage. Perry and I began to fight constantly. It broke my heart because before this crisis with Barrett, all we'd ever had were tiny disagreements that could be resolved in under thirty minutes and settled with a hug. After the revelation of Barrett's drug use, it was non-stop bickering in our household. Barrett was either running away from home, getting tossed in jail or receiving suspensions from school for various offenses until the day he finally got expelled.

The toll on our already stressed-out marriage gained momentum and sadly, we blamed each other for the choices that Barrett choose. We refused the therapy services that Barrett's school guidance counselor encouraged to us. The one thing that we agreed on back then was that it was Barrett's problem, not ours. We didn't need counseling. Instead, we slugged out our frustrations verbally on each other every night.

Maxon couldn't move out quickly enough when he started college, and then it was just Perry and I along with Barrett's nightmare whirlwind.

Perry began staying late at the office every night and I devoted myself fully to saving Barrett. I thought that if I could just fix our son, everything would be great again. Near perfect, like it had been before. I could prove to Perry that I was the perfect mother and again, resume my rightful place as his per-

fect wife. But in the meantime, the fighting continued.

When I felt that Perry didn't appreciate my efforts to save our son, I accused him of cheating, of abandoning our family...of giving up.

I'll never forget what he said, even though it was so many years ago: "I guess you're right, Meryl," he said sadly, shaking his head. "I've given up. I've tried, I really have but I can't do this anymore."

He promptly moved out and resorted to sleeping in his office before he found an apartment... that was how badly he wanted to be away from the mess of what had become of our lives.

Back then, I don't know what I was angrier at—the fact that Perry left and the accompanying sadness that had taken residence in my heart over his absence or the jealousy that I secretly harbored. Many times, I wished I could leave too just like he and Maxon had. Sometimes just the thought of walking away and leaving it all behind was all that got me through the tough times when Barrett had once again overdosed, once again got thrown in jail, once again come home drunk and high, looking for items to steal while simultaneously trying to destroy the house. How I resented Perry for being able to walk away from what I felt should have been our shared hell.

When he got remarried a couple of years after our divorce was finalized, I was livid. He said that he wanted to stay friends. I balked at the idea. When he called to invite me to the wedding and I screamed at him, saying that he left us and wanted me to suffer through the living nightmare Barrett was putting me through. Then he told me something that I swore I would never forgive him for. He told me to walk away from Barrett.

"Change the locks," he said. "Let him know that you'll be there when he's ready to change... for good. And only then. That's what I did."

I told him he was a terrible father for giving up on our baby.

"Take a dose of reality, Meryl," Perry said. "Our baby is a grown

man in his early twenties. He's capable of knowing when to ask for help. Yes, he's suffering from a sickness but he also knows how to make choices. If you continue doing what you're doing, you'll only be enabling him. And that's not doing him any favors. We've tried to help; we've tried everything and I'm not going down with him. You shouldn't either."

I was so angry with Perry that I didn't take his message to heart. I hung up on him and we didn't speak until a year later when we found out that Barrett had a baby. Barrett, his then girlfriend, Tessa, and their infant showed up first on Perry and his second wife, Serena's door.

Perry called me immediately.

"Meryl, Tessa had a baby," he said. "The baby is Barrett's. They showed up here demanding money. Serena and I refused but offered to let the baby and even Tessa stay with us, if Tessa would stay clean. They got angry and Barrett promised we'd never see any of them, especially not the baby ever again. Dear God, we've got to help that little one."

I felt like I got hit with a ton of bricks. I hadn't known that Tessa, Barrett's on and off again girlfriend and fellow drug user, was even pregnant.

That was how I found out I had a grandchild. And I was horrified by the news. All I asked of Barrett, when it was clear to me that nothing I could ever do would get him off of drugs, was to never get any woman pregnant.

"Do not bring a child into your life," I pleaded to him several times. "You can't do that to an innocent life until you're good and clean." But he had. I was furious with both he and Tessa for their selfish actions which brought about a fresh slew of worries—would my grandbaby have any drug addictions?

Sure enough as Perry had predicted, Barrett, Tessa, and a small pink bundle wound up on the front porch of the home where Perry and I had once thought we had it all.

"See your new granddaughter, Mom?" Barrett asked me. "We need money. Let us in. All we need

is one, two hundred bucks and you can see your granddaughter."

Perry and Tessa were twitchy, they couldn't make eye contact and their eyes were wide, searching. I called it "drug mode." They truly weren't capable of human emotion in that state. They were after one thing and one thing only and would do whatever it took to get it. Even tempting me with my newborn granddaughter like a carrot on a stick.

It was freezing outside and though Barrett and Tessa didn't seem to mind the bone-chilling temperatures, my baby granddaughter wailed from her cocoon made of one light gauzy blanket. Her right foot stuck out partway.

I made a decision then for the baby. I invited them all in without a second thought. Barrett instructed Tessa not to let me hold the baby until they had the money.

I told them it was no problem as I went for my desk drawer while keeping an eye on them. I grabbed my checkbook and told them that I didn't have any cash but would be happy to write them a check.

Barrett was irritated by that. He rubbed at a sore on his neck while he thought about it.

"Fine, whatever!" he finally said. "Just do it."

I ended up giving them a few blank checks and Tessa thrust the bundle into my arms.

Tears poured automatically from my eyes as I saw the baby's sweet face. She looked so much like Perry, much like Barrett had when he was a baby. Sadly, there was almost no trace of Perry left in Barrett. The drugs had washed most of the Old Barrett away.

The baby grabbed onto my finger. I know that babies do that instinctually but I took it to mean, 'Please help. Save me. You're my only hope.'

I knew it was true. This baby needed me.

"What's her name?" I asked as Barrett and Tessa whispered to each other.

Barrett looked annoyed and ignored me.

"We need a car," he said finally.

"Yeah, we need a ride," Tessa said. "Give us your keys. We'll bring it back."

"That's fine," I said. "It's unlocked. Keys are in the car."

"Real smart," Tessa scoffed and they bolted for the door, without regard for their infant.

The baby still in my arms, I rushed for the front door after them and locked it, pushing the deadbolt into place. I then grabbed my phone and called the police, giving them a run-down on the situation over the blare of my car alarm which was always set.

I looked out the window as Barrett banged on the door and Tessa desperately tried to pry open my locked car door.

The police came just as they were taking off on foot, checks in hand. As soon as I saw them approaching, I ended the call with the dispatcher and called Perry, telling him everything... how I had given them voided checks from a long ago closed bank account and tricked them into giving me the baby.

"I'll be right over," he said. The police had Barrett and Tessa in custody for existing warrants on drug and theft charges when he arrived and got to hold his granddaughter for the first time.

"You'll never see her again!" Barrett screamed at us from the backseat of the patrol car. "I promise I'll be out soon and will get her back. Enjoy holding her now because it will be the last time!"

I watched Barrett's face, twisted with rage, through my tears.

A social worker was the next to arrive and we eventually learned that our darling baby grandchild was never officially named in the crowded county hospital where she was born.

Perry and I both cried over that fact. We were granted temporary joint custody of her while Barrett and Tessa sat in jail and we named her Gayle, which got printed on her birth certificate, a name that, long ago, we had saved for our own daughter that never came to be. We loved being granted the privilege to take care of Gayle in the meantime.

(Continued on page 60) 27



FATHER DOESN'T KNOW BEST

Take Your Own Advice

Dad and I skimmed the menus for a minute. “The grilled salmon looks good,” he said, then added in a low voice, “Don’t let the prices scare you, Dora. It’s my treat so order what you want.”

I’ll admit my heart did jump somewhat at the cost of the entrees. This restaurant had always been his and Mom’s choice for their anniversary dinner, but I’d never been here. Now I knew why. I’d moved out of my parents’ house two years ago after finishing business school and watched my pennies carefully. Unfortunately, this beautiful place was clearly out of sync with my budget.

28 On the other hand, Dad spent freely and shook his head at my counting nickels and dimes.

PET LOVERS KEEPSAKE

A beautiful warm and touching reproductions of poems . . .

My Gift to Jesus & Four Feet in Heaven

Printed on high-quality parchment-like paper, suitable for framing, 7 1/4" X 10 3/4"

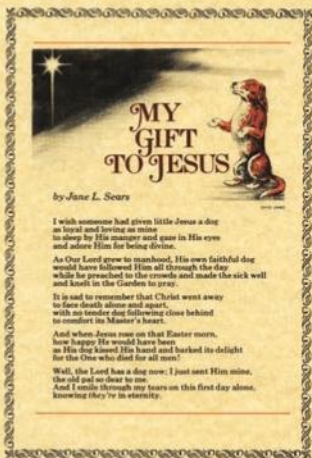
These beautiful poems can be yours to keep or to give as a gift to a special friend.

I WANT TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF YOUR **SPECIAL OFFER** OF BUY 2 FOR \$10.00 & GET 1 FREE OR 3 FOR \$10.00

Please send me ___ reproduction(s) of My Gift to Jesus (Dog) at \$5.00 each.

Please send me ___ reproduction(s) of Four Feet In Heaven (Cat) at \$5.00 each.

ORDER YOURS TODAY!



Please place this entire form in an envelope and mail to:
TRUE RENDITIONS, LLC
105 E. 34TH STREET
SUITE 141
NEW YORK, NY 10016

PAYMENT ENCLOSED
(Check or Money Order payable to True Renditions)
Canadian & Foreign orders Add \$5.00 per order.
US FUNDS ONLY.

NAME: _____ (PLEASE PRINT)

ADDRESS: _____ APT: _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____ PHONE NUMBER: _____

PAYMENT ENCLOSED Canadian & Foreign Customers: Please use either major credit cards or money orders in US dollars only. Please make checks and money orders payable to True Renditions, LLC. Add \$5.00 for Canadian and foreign postage.

CHARGE MY CREDIT CARD:

VISA MASTERCARD AMERICAN EXPRESS DISCOVER

ACCT# _____ EXPIRATION _____

SIGNATURE _____

Please allow 4-6 weeks for delivery. Credit card payments for your books will appear on your statement as True Renditions LLC. All previous offers from former publisher(s) are null and void.

When Mom died six months ago from cancer, Dad buried himself in his real estate business, adding to its success. A while back, he'd given up the selling of properties and now owned the business that employed several agents and a property management division. He'd done well financially before Mom's passing, but his extra hard work made his office number one in sales and business referrals. Some may call it nepotism, but I managed the accounting division for his company and loved it. Dad trusted me enough to pay some of his personal monthly bills too, including his credit card, so I'd eventually see what tonight's dinner out cost him. And it would definitely be pricey.

"Thanks for sharing tonight with me, Dad," I said referring to the fact that today was his and Mom's anniversary.

"If you hadn't fit me into your busy schedule, I would've sat home and brooded," he said only slightly teasing. "I'm sorry your beau couldn't make it. I'm anxious to meet the new man in your life."

"His family was celebrating his grandmother's 85th birthday tonight." I'd met Clark two months ago at a party and at the end of the evening, when he'd asked for my phone number, I was certain I'd never hear from him again. I was wrong. He phoned me the following week and we'd been dating steadily ever since. Last year he'd started a landscape business that kept him busy year around in the mild climate of our California town. "Meeting a parent is sort of a serious step."

"I just want to make sure he's worthy of my only child." He started to say something more, but two attractive middle-aged women approached our table.

"Hello, Tucker," one of them said. "How are you doing?"

Dad stood and nodded. "Very well, Linda. Nice to see you."

Linda put her hand on Dad's arm. "So glad to see you out. This is my friend, Brenda. Brenda, this is Tucker Patterson."

Brenda, beamed as she shook Dad's hand, holding it a bit longer than I thought necessary. Her salon-

styled reddish-hued hair looked as fashionable as the tight black cock-tail dress accentuating her improbably buxom figure. "So nice to meet you, Tucker. Linda has nothing but good things to say about you. She mentioned that you're in the real estate business. If you're not busy next week, how about meeting for lunch? I'd like to discuss some things with you." Were her eyes really that blue or did she wear contacts?

Dad gave her a polite smile and dug a card from the inside pocket of his jacket. "Call anytime, Brenda." He turned to me. "This is my daughter, Dora. She works in the office also."

Neither woman gave me much more than a courteous nod before making more small talk with Dad, then leaving to return to their own table, both with backward glances and girly waves. I felt a surge of annoyance skim through me. Were those women actually flirting? Were they interested in my still handsome and fit, recently widowed father? And was Brenda's so called business lunch date a ploy to set the hook? My female radar activated to stand-by alert, but as soon as the women left, Dad turned the conversation back to Clark.

"You know I have good sense when it comes to men and their motives," he told me after the waiter took our orders. I didn't need him to remind me about my fizzled relationship with Tripp, my last boyfriend, but Dad wouldn't let it go and said, "I knew from the get go that Tripp wasn't for you. From what I could see and from what you told me, he never paid enough attention to you."

Thankfully the waiter chose that moment to deliver a bottle of wine to our table. "You were as right about Tripp as you are about this wine, Dad. It's delicious." I changed the subject and the rest of the evening went by without further mention of Tripp and my finding out about his pregnant girlfriend a few months after we'd started dating. I'd been nothing more than a diversion, one of several more he found after we called it quits.

Once or twice during our meal, Dad steered the conversation back

to Clark, wanting to know how his new business was doing. I explained, "His brother and wife own a nursery and he's able to get supplies through them which is a good deal all the way around. And word-of-mouth is adding to his clientele list all the time. I know you can appreciate what a hard worker he is."

"Is he making enough money so you've stopped that ridiculous Dutch treat idea when you go out?" Dad asked, making me sorry I'd ever confessed to our dating practice of each paying our own way when we went out to dinner or a movie. Initially it had been my idea when Clark and I talked about how hard it was making ends meet when you're first out on your own.

I took the last bite of my decadent chocolate dessert and gave Dad a satisfied grin. "I like paying my own way while Clark's business grows, Dad. Call it a little sacrifice on my part. And anyway, where is it written that the guy has to pay for the date?"

He shook his head of thick gray hair. "Call me old-fashioned. I think a man should pay."

I gave him a skeptical look. "Tripp paid for everything, Dad, and look at what a jerk he turned out to be."

He laughed. "You're right, Dora. Does that give me the right to say 'I told you so' when I pointed out a few things to you about that guy and you brushed them all off?"

"I'll let you say it once if you promise to let the subject of Tripp die a peaceful death, never to be mentioned again," I told him.

"Agreed." He signed the credit card slip and after the waiter discreetly removed the black leather sheath, we left the restaurant. For a moment, we stood outside the front door in the crisp air when behind us, a feminine voice called to Dad. "Tucker," Brenda said, joining us, and placing her hand familiarly on Dad's arm. "So nice to have met you. I'll be sure to give you a call next week." Those crystal blue eyes turned in my direction. "And nice meeting you too, Diane."

"Dora," I corrected before she and Linda sauntered off into the parking lot. "Do you get a lot of that, Dad?"

"A lot of what?"

"I'd call them female piranhas."

He chuckled. "That's not nice, Dora. They were just being polite. Brenda seems very pleasant and friendly." He winked mischievously. "And I have no intention of jumping into the dating pool."

I started to tell him that Brenda looked to have other ideas for him, but let it go.

At the end of the week, Clark came over for a home-cooked spaghetti dinner; he brought the wine. I enjoyed cooking and he liked being on the receiving end of my hobby. I waited until after dinner, while he was helping me tuck our plates into the dishwasher, before mentioning the idea of my dad dating.

"Your dad's still young, Dora," he said, his brown eyes giving me a slightly sympathetic look. "And I'm sure he's lonely too."

"He has me," I shot back, a little too intensely.

He gave me a quick kiss on the cheek. "You're terrific, but it's not the same thing." He closed the dishwasher door and when we moved into the small living room, he asked, "Do I detect a little jealousy on your part?"

I sat on my couch and picked up the DVD Clark borrowed from his sister-in-law, a light romantic comedy with stars we both liked. "Mom's only been gone for six months. I think it's way too early for Dad to be moving on into any sort of relationship."

"You're jumping to conclusions based on a simple meeting. Who said he's going to take up with this Brenda woman? Anyway, what's the magic number in terms of time?" He tilted his handsome face and gave me a sweet grin, trying his best to lighten the mood.

I smiled back and handed him the movie. "To be honest, never. I don't want Dad replacing Mom in his heart."

"He won't be replacing her, just making some space for someone he wants to share part of his life with." He hit the remote and he settled in beside me while the movie started. "Besides, it sounds like your dad has pretty good social and relationship instincts."

"If you're referring to the never-again-to-be-mentioned Tripp in my past, I guess you're right. But I have to warn you, he's not wild about us paying our own way when we go out."

Clark rubbed his hand across one cheek. "Does he know my last significant other spent money like water, both hers and mine, and put me into serious debt before she ditched me for a stock broker?" He gave me a deep kiss. "And how refreshing it was to hear you suggest a beneficial financial arrangement when it comes to dating? I hope he understands that once my debts are under control..."

"Paid off," I interrupted.

"Paid off," he agreed. "I'll turn into the Alpha male he expects."

I snuggled into the curve of his shoulder. "I like the male you are right now just fine."

He chuckled. "Good thing, because it'll be a while before my bank balance is healthy again."

I was up early the next morning, ready to start my Saturday errands. Since Dad was an early riser too, I decided to make a stop at his place on the way to the supermarket to see if he needed anything. I did a double-take when I noticed a bright red luxury car at the curb in front of his house. Kind of early for company, I thought, exiting my own car.

As I turned my key in the front door, I knocked and called, "Dad! It's just me." I came to an abrupt halt. Brenda stood in front of me, dressed in an oversized dress shirt I could only imagine as being Dad's, with her hair less than perfect and her makeup non-existent. For a moment we stared at each other, then Dad walked into the room, saying "Brenda, is the coffee on?" He had the courtesy to freeze at the sight of Brenda and I standing at the door. "Good morning, Dora," he finally said, after clearing his throat. He moved toward Brenda and took her hand. "You remember Brenda, don't you?"

I found my voice. "Of course. Sorry to interrupt. I wanted to see if you needed anything at the store." My stare must've turned into a glare because a fake smile crossed

Brenda's face.

"Nice to see you again, Dora," she said a bit on the smug side. She gave Dad a quick kiss on the cheek. "I'll get the coffee going, Tucker." She left us and for a minute the room remained silent. I knew my face revealed the state of shock I felt.

Dad gave me a brief hug. "Don't be upset, Dora. Brenda's a wonderful woman and we enjoy each other's company."

"It's happening too fast, Dad."

"Maybe to some people, but we just hit it off at the lunch meeting and, well, things progressed quickly from there." He smiled and I hated to admit he looked happier than I'd seen him since Mom's diagnosis over a year ago. "Nature sort of took over." He chuckled.

"More like lust took over," I commented, disliking the scowl that put on Dad's face. Brenda didn't strike me as the wallflower type, more like the type who'd throw herself at Dad and make sure he knew she was available for a relationship.

"That's uncalled for, young lady. She's a nice woman and I like her. I seem to recall you being head-over-heels about Tripp after your first couple of dates. And this new guy, Clark, you hardly knew before you started dating on a regular basis. Why is it any different for me?"

That deflated my aggravation somewhat. He was right. I sighed. "Because you're my father? Because parents aren't usually involved in the dating world?"

He grinned. "It's something we both need to get used to." He kissed my forehead.

"So do you need anything at the grocery store?" I asked, changing the subject.

"Not a thing."

I opened the door. "And I promise—no more dropping in unannounced."

"Deal," he said with a twinkle in his eye.

I left and once again, gloom settled in around me and I tried shaking it off while I ran errands. Unfortunately, the negative mood continued the next couple of weeks. At work Dad and I kept a distance

(Continued on page 59) 31

Rekindled Romance or **DISASTROUS DATE?**

Mom's Boyfriend

When I called my mother the other day to ask her to come to dinner on Saturday, the day before Mother's Day, I got a big surprise.

"I'm sorry, dear, I can't. I have a date," she said cheerily.

"You have a what?" I asked, completely confused. Mom was sixty-eight and had been a widow for over a year.

"A date. You remember what a date is, don't you? Being invited out to dinner and a show."

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. "B-but you always come to dinner with us the day before Mother's Day," I stammered.



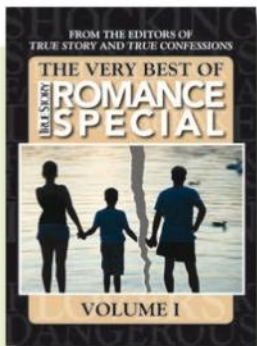
THE BEST OF THE BEST

NEW PRINT COLLECTIONS FROM OUR *SPECIALS*

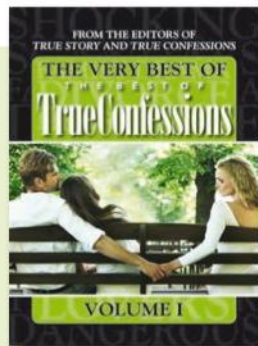
FROM THE EDITORS OF *TRUE STORY* AND *TRUE CONFESSIONS*



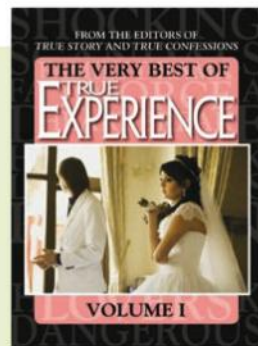
VOLUME I



\$12.00 + \$3.99 S&H = \$15.99 TOTAL



\$12.00 + \$3.99 S&H = \$15.99 TOTAL

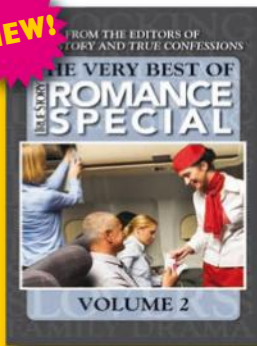


\$12.00 + \$3.99 S&H = \$15.99 TOTAL

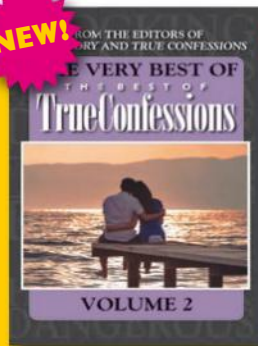


\$12.00 + \$3.99 S&H = \$15.99 TOTAL

VOLUME II



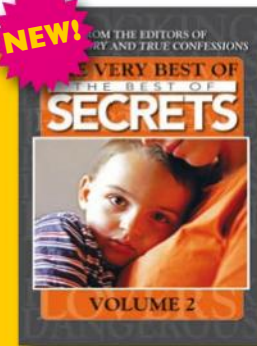
\$12.00 + \$3.99 S&H = \$15.99 TOTAL



\$12.00 + \$3.99 S&H = \$15.99 TOTAL



\$12.00 + \$3.99 S&H = \$15.99 TOTAL



\$12.00 + \$3.99 S&H = \$15.99 TOTAL

Order FOUR for \$48.00 and we'll pay your shipping and handling!
For US Shipping Only. Canadian orders must add \$15.00

NAME: _____
 ADDRESS: _____ APT: _____
 CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____
 EMAIL ADDRESS: _____
 PHONE NUMBER: _____

PAYMENT ENCLOSED Canadian & Foreign Customers: Please use either major credit cards or Western Union money orders in US dollars only. Please make checks and money orders payable to True Renditions, LLC. Add \$10.00 for Canadian and foreign postage.

CHARGE MY CREDIT CARD:
 VISA MASTERCARD AMERICAN EXPRESS DISCOVER
 ACCT# _____ EXPIRATION _____
 SIGNATURE _____



Please place this entire form in an envelope and mail to:
TRUE RENDITIONS, LLC
105 E. 34TH STREET
SUITE 141
NEW YORK, NY 10016

Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery. Credit card payments for your books will appear on your statement as True Renditions LLC, not as the book name. All previous book offers from former publisher(s) are null and void.

She and one of her friends in her Woman's Club must be planning something was my first thought. Surely she wasn't abandoning a family tradition to be with someone she sees every week.

She sighed. "I know, dear, and I'm sorry to cancel out on you, but Andy and I have a lot of catching up to do."

I was stunned. "You have a date—with a man?" I squeaked.

"Of course. When a gentleman friend asks you out it's called a date. And I think I'm old enough not to need your permission."

"Mommmy! What are you doing? Do you know this man? Do you..."

"Don't fret, Minnie. I don't have time right now to explain it to you, but be assured Andy is an old friend, not a stranger I found on the Internet. I knew him long before I met your father. Come over Friday afternoon, help me decide what to wear, and I'll tell you all about him. I love you," she said firmly and hung up.

Exasperated, I put the phone down. I'd learned years ago that arguing with Mom never worked. She could be a very determined lady. She and Dad were married for fifty years, and they were the epitome of what marriage ought to be where two become one like the Bible says.

Dad passed away a little more than a year ago. Mom was devastated, but, instead of moving in with us or moving to a retirement community, she remained in her own house, joined several volunteer committees, and stayed as busy as ever. She was healthy, still energetic and attractive, and she said briskly, "I'm not going to waste the time I have left. Dad would not like it. When he was told he was dying, he cautioned me several times not to live in mourning the rest of my life."

I was proud of her for that, but I never dreamed it would mean being interested in another man. She and Dad had always seemed so 'together'. Oh, they had their disagreements and spats like most married couples do, but the love and respect they had for each other hugely overcame any differences. My brother,

Dale, and I never had to be afraid our parents would get divorced like many of our friends did. Our home and our family were always secure. How could she possibly be interested in another man?

It was something I'd have to think about, and the more I thought, the more it did make some sense. If he is truly an old friend she's known for years, if he is also widowed or, at least single, if he is as good a man as she is a woman, well, it might be a good thing for both of them. It must be very hard to be alone after years of having someone you love at your side.

Mom had done very well coping with Dad's death, but the sparkle in her eyes had died with him. I'd have to start thinking about her instead of just my perception of her. Dale and I both had families of our own. We were responsible for ourselves, not dependent on our parent, but it seemed impossible to change the image in my mind of the two people that had shaped our lives.

Not any harder than what she's gone through. Be happy for her. Stop feeling sorry for yourself, my heart said.

"Okay, okay," I snapped. "When I meet this Andy and see he is a good person and worthy of my mother's attention, then I'll be happy for her. You can't be too careful about people these days."

And if he's not what you think he should be? my stubborn heart persisted. Do you think you can change her mind? I sighed. Of course not, but I had to try. It was my turn to take care of her.

On Friday, I could see that a little bit of her sparkle was back. She was excited about seeing this Andy again, but nervous about what to wear. It had been more than fifty years since she'd seen him. How close was her memory of him to the reality of today? What would he think of her?

I could see these doubts lurking behind her eyes as she told me how she came to know him.

"Andy was my first 'date'. We were in the sixth grade, and his parents took us to a high school foot-

ball game. Football was everything to him then. His dream was to be quarterback on the high school team and be good enough some day for the pros. Football was my favorite sport, too, and from then on, thanks to our parents, we never missed a game together until he started playing on the team in the eighth grade. We liked each other, but our passion for the game was what drove our connection.

"When he achieved his dream, I was so proud I thought I'd burst. The night that I was his date at the victory banquet when he quarterbacked the team that won the state championship was the highlight of my life at that time."

She paused, and it was as if a cloud passed over her face. With a big sigh, she said, "Then something changed. Andy was caught up in choosing the college team he wanted out of several that offered him scholarships to play for them. As our relationship grew and changed from just football to a more romantic level, we'd planned to go to the same college. One that had a great team and a good drama department that I needed."

I was shocked. "Drama? You wanted to be an actress?"

She smiled. "When I was picked to be in several dramatic presentations I found I really like being on the stage, and I'd decided to be an actress. Colleges with both a good sports team and a good drama department were scarce. Our choices were few, and we finally decided on the one that offered him the best scholarship. Or at least, that's what I thought."

She paused again. "The night before graduation, Andy dropped his bombshell. A big university had offered him a scholarship at the last minute and he had accepted it without telling me. I was already enrolled in the college we'd agreed on, and there was no way I could change it. He went west, I went east."

"Oh, my! We never knew," I murmured. My mother had a whole other life she never told us about. I never told my children about my life before they came along. Did they ever wonder about it? As far as a

child knows, Mommy was always just Mommy.

I looked at my Mom with new eyes, and asked, "What happened then?"

"It was the last time I saw Andy except on TV football games. He succeeded big time, leading his team to the championship and being selected by his favorite pro team when he graduated. He was so obsessed with success he forgot all about me."

"Oh, Mom, I'm so sorry," I said, so moved by her story I couldn't wait to hear the rest of it. "Then what happened?" I wasn't ready for the next surprise.

She sighed deeply. "It was the toughest year of my life—until I began to really notice the guy playing Romeo to my Juliet in the spring drama presentation. Your father was handsome, smart, and a very believable Romeo. He knew I had been depressed during the last year, and he poured his acting skill into making me forget about it. We connected as if we really were the famous fictional couple."

I gasped. I didn't know Dad was an actor, too.

"He was the best. He had a way of turning himself into the character he was playing. He made me forget all about how much I loved football. Even Andy faded away."

Memories of story time with Dad came flooding back, and now I could clearly see the talent he had. Dale and I wanted him to continue reading to us long after we were able to read the stories ourselves.

"What happened to Andy?" I asked.

Mom took a deep breath. "He made the pro team he'd chosen, and was on the way to becoming famous for his skills until a three-hundred-pound lineman landed on him and crushed the bones in his leg. They managed to save the leg and enable him to walk, but he was not able to play football again. I saw an article in the paper that he got married and became a coach on a college team. That was thirty years ago. I've not heard anything else about him until he called the other day."

"Did he know about Dad?"

She nodded. "He saw the obituary in the paper last year. He said he didn't think it proper to call any sooner."

I thought about it for a moment. "What happened to his wife? Did he have a family?"

"I don't know yet. He said he was also alone and would tell me all about it."

It was my turn to take a deep breath. I could see she was excited about seeing this man again. This might be a good thing for both of them. I would reserve my opinion until I met him, and he proved it true.

The next day, I was almost as nervous as Mom was about their 'date'. She asked me to be there and let him in when he came. When Andy arrived promptly at six, he held out his hand when I opened the door and said, "Hello. You must be Minnie. I'm Andy Alderman. I'm so glad to meet you."

I was impressed. He was a tall man with lots of silvery white hair and a neatly trimmed beard to match. Intense blue eyes smiled at me, and he looked like he was a regular at a fitness gym. He carried a silver-headed cane and walked slowly as he came inside.

He and Mom just stood there looking at each other for a moment as if tasting with their eyes. Then he reached out and touched her cheek.

"Hello, Mary. It's been a long time. You look terrific," he said softly.

She blushed. "Yes, it has been a long time," she replied. "I'm so glad you called."

I could tell they were reconnecting, seeing the things they remembered, noticing what had changed. Apparently, there was enough recognition because they smiled, acknowledging the remnants of the long-ago relationship. It was time for me to go.

"Okay, you two, have a good time. Mom, I'll see you tomorrow. I'm so glad to meet you, Mr. Alderman," I said as I edged toward the door.

He turned his smile on me. "Call me Andy. I will see you later," he said in a self-confident tone.

When I told my husband about it, expressing my doubts, he said, "It's

her life. You can't tell her how to live it. From what I know about your lovely mother, it wouldn't do any good anyway. Seems like she's done pretty good so far. Pray for her and let her know you are there if she needs you. And be happy for her if this works out. Everybody needs somebody to share their life with, even in our old age."

What he said made good sense. I might have to get used to my mother's attention and love being given to somebody besides me and my family, somebody I didn't know. It didn't look easy, and I could only hope it was the right thing for all of us.

Andy rented one of the popular vacation cabins that provided a lucrative summer income for our town, and in the next few weeks, Dale and I and our families were frequently invited to dinner with Mom and him. We included him in all our usual family get-togethers, and little by little through the summer I could see their relationship reconnect and grow. I was happy to see that they didn't try to rush things.

It was wonderful to see the sparkle return to Mom's eyes and her happy humming I hadn't heard since Dad died. It wasn't hard to see why Mom loved Andy. He was intelligent, sweet, and witty, smoothing over awkward moments with just the right words and smile. I was beginning to look forward to the times he was with us. And the change in my mother was obvious. She was like a wilted flower that suddenly began to bloom again. Maybe he was an answer to prayer.

Things were looking good until one morning Andy's daughter knocked on my door.

Glenda Baker was tall and slim, a female replica of her father except for a wealth of auburn hair and big brown eyes instead of blue. I could see right away that she inherited his commanding presence. She obviously knew exactly who we were, and I was immediately aware that she was not happy with us.

"I hope my father hasn't been a nuisance to you," she said to me after a polite but chilly introduction.

(Continued on page 62) 35

REBUILDING OUR LOVE

Marrying my Ex-Husband

“Don’t let Sydney see it.”

I heard the whisper as soon as I walked towards the entrance of the small lunch room of the accounting firm I work at.

“Right.” I heard another whisper. “Poor girl has been through enough as it is—”

“Don’t let Sydney see what?” I asked, trying

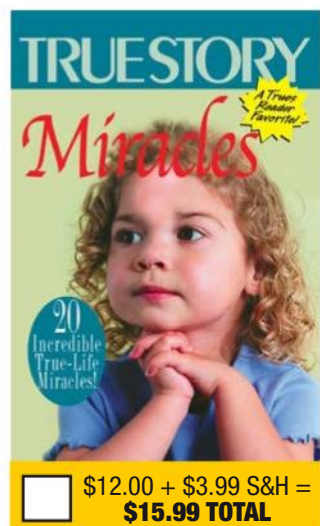
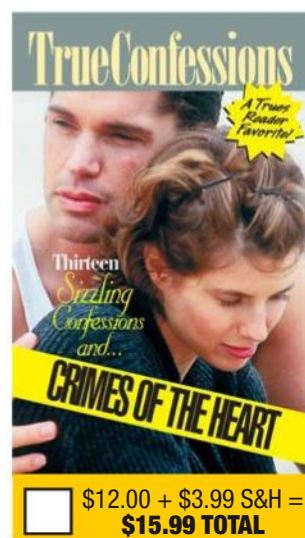
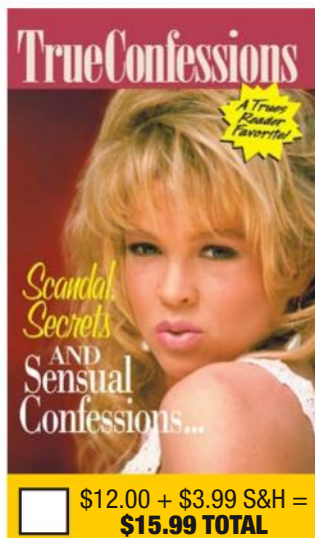
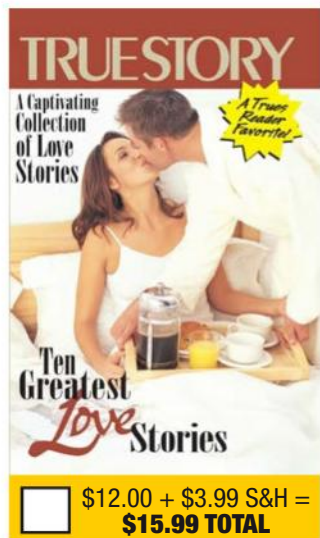
- to sound casual as I walked in. I considered
- the co-workers seated around the table,
- all dear friends and I knew they had good
- intentions but I was tired of being treated as
- though I were suffering from some terrible
- disease when in reality, I was just fresh from a
- simple divorce... well, kind of simple.



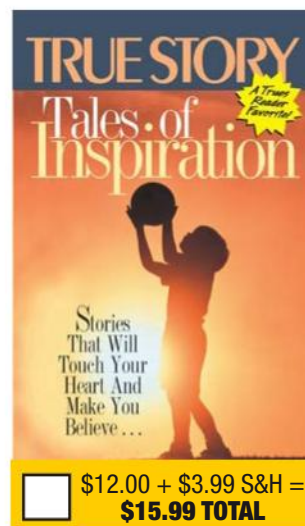
**ORDER
YOURS
TODAY!**

BACK IN PRINT!

Our classic collections from the editors of *True Story* and *True Confessions* are available again in paperback!



Order ALL SIX for \$72.00 and we'll pay your shipping and handling!
For US Shipping Only. Canadian orders must add \$10.00



NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____ (PLEASE PRINT)

_____ APT: _____

CITY: _____

STATE: _____ ZIP: _____

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

PHONE NUMBER: _____

PAYMENT ENCLOSED Canadian & Foreign Customers: Please use either major credit cards or Western Union money orders in US dollars only. Please make checks and money orders payable to True Renditions, LLC. Add \$10.00 for Canadian and foreign postage.

CHARGE MY CREDIT CARD:

VISA MASTERCARD AMERICAN EXPRESS DISCOVER

ACCT# _____ EXPIRATION _____

SIGNATURE _____

Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery. Credit card payments for your books will appear on your statement as True Renditions LLC, not as the book name. All previous book offers from former publisher(s) are null and void.

Please place this entire form in an envelope and mail to:
TRUE RENDITIONS, LLC
105 E. 34TH STREET
SUITE 141
NEW YORK, NY 10016

Devin quickly fumbled with a magazine and put it on top of the newspaper article in the middle of the paper.

Erica sighed. "It's no use," she said, looking at Devin. Then she picked up the newspaper and looked right at me. "You're going to hear about it sooner or later. Might as well hear about it when you've got friends nearby."

"For goodness sake," I said, reaching for the paper. "What is it?"

As soon as I saw it, my mouth went dry and I forgot to breathe.

Wedding Announcement, the black text of the newspaper read. Castillo — Young. Yvonne Castillo and Webster Young announce their engagement. The bride to be is a mother of two from a previous marriage and the groom to be is an art teacher at Salisbury Prep School. The couple plans to marry one month from now in the beautiful month of June....

I closed the paper and set it down. Now it was real.

"Syd," Devin said slowly. "Are you okay?"

"Come sit," said Dominic, patting the chair next to him.

"I'll make you some tea," Erica said.

"Guys, I'll be fine," I said. *Sure, I'll be fine*, I thought, glumly. *I've just been stabbed in the heart by the society section*. "Look, Webster is free to date or marry whomever he chooses. We're officially divorced. Plus, we stayed civil. We're friends."

"Honey," Erica said in that motherly tone she uses when she thinks I don't know what I'm talking about. "This all happened so fast. It's unexpected. It would be completely natural if you were upset."

"We're here for you," Dominic said.

Devin nodded.

"No, no, no," I said. "You've got it all wrong. Really. I asked for the divorce. Remember?"

They all just looked at me.

"And we're friends," I said. "We get along. I am not your typical bitter ex."

"We know that, sweetie," Erica said. "If you need to talk...."

I tried my best to assure them that

I was fine, grabbed my salad and avocado pita wrap from the fridge and faked that I had a business call to take at my desk during lunch. I don't think there's a snowball's chance in Hades that any of them bought it, but I just couldn't stand to be around anyone right then.

At my desk, it was all I could do not to break down. How could Webster remarry so soon? And Yvonne Castillo? I couldn't understand what in the world Webster saw in her. I had only met her once and found her to be manipulative, cold and rude. But then again, if I were looking at her from a man's perspective, I guess I could understand what Webster just like any other male might find appealing — Yvonne Castillo was a knockout.

And I was a Plain Jane in comparison. My stomach soured at the thought of the time I met Yvonne and I pushed my lunch away. After Webster and I agreed to divorce, we promised to stay friends. And we both kept that promise. One day, after I had finally received the promotion at work that I had been working so hard towards, I felt that I had to share the news with Webster. We had been together when I had heard about and started working towards the promotion.

I picked up two strawberry-banana smoothies (Webster's personal favorite) and brought them to Salisbury Prep right about the time that school let out. I parked in the visitor parking lot and walked towards the faculty lot and almost dropped the smoothies.

Webster was walking towards his car with a beautiful dark-haired woman by his side. He had his arm around her and I wanted to scream. Of course, I had immediately chided myself for feeling that way. Webster and I were divorced and we were both free to date anyone. But I hadn't. Hadn't even planned on it, to be perfectly honest. And I guess I just thought that he had felt the same... how very wrong I was.

"Sydney?!" Webster said when he saw me standing there. "What are you doing here?" He looked down at the smoothies in my hands and stepped forward.

"I—uh, just thought I'd stop by and say hello," I said, laughing nervously and feeling like a fool.

"Oh my, well, what a nice surprise," Webster said, looking back at his pretty companion.

"A big surprise," she said with a fake smile.

"Oh gosh, where are my manners?" Webster said. "Sydney, I want you to meet Yvonne. Yvonne Castillo, this is Sydney. My ex-wife."

"Charmed," she said, keeping her distance.

"Nice to meet you," I said.

"Lovely of you to bring Webby a... what is that?" she asked. "An after-school snack?"

Webby? I thought. I have never called Webster "Webby" in four years of marriage. I couldn't have imagined that he would have liked the silly moniker.

"These are, uh, um, nothing, really," I stammered. I felt so sick to my stomach.

"That is so sweet of you," Webster said. "Yvonne, would you mind giving us just a second?"

She shrugged her shoulders but looked very annoyed.

"I'm sorry, Webster," I said the minute she stepped out of hearing distance. "I had no right to just show up like this. I just, well, I wanted to tell you that I got the promotion at work and I brought these to celebrate. Stupid idea."

"Hey, that's great news!" he said. "Congratulations, Sydney!" He hugged me and I'd be lying if I said that my heart didn't skip a couple of beats when I smelled his favorite aftershave and the peppermint candies he was always munching on. How strong scents are to our fond memories.

"That wasn't a stupid idea at all," he said. "Yvonne and I are just on our way to supper. Come with, please."

I looked over to see that Yvonne had wandered closer and was shooting me daggers.

"I'd... better not," I said. "I should go. But please—" I held out the smoothie cups and set them on the back of his car. "Take these as a before-dinner snack. You always loved this kind. Enjoy."

"Oh no," Webster said. "Are you sure?"

"Definitely," I said. I had already lost my appetite. "One hundred percent. I'll talk with you later."

"Okay, well, thanks, Sydney," Webster said, giving me another little hug. "And hey, congratulations. I'm so happy for you."

"Thanks," I said. "I'm happy for you, too."

And I had tried to be. But it wasn't easy. You see, my divorce to Webster was a very tough decision that almost tore me apart. The short of it is that I asked for a divorce although I was still in love with him. The long version is that Webster always wanted children, he was very clear about that while we were dating. I had wanted children, too, but after three years of marriage and no baby in sight, I went to the doctor only to find out that due to an undiagnosed medical condition, it would basically take a miracle for me to get pregnant.

Poor Webster was devastated. He moped around the house for weeks but tried to cheer me up at the same time.

"We'll adopt," he said. But his heart wasn't in it. He just wasn't the same.

"Sorry you got stuck with me," I told him one day. "A wife who can't get pregnant. The worst kind of wife for a guy who wants to be a daddy as much as you do."

"It's not your fault," he said. "You know I'd never leave you because of this, right?"

And I knew he meant that. Webster believed strongly in the sanctity of marriage. Our vows were treasured. That's how I knew that the only way for Webster to truly be happy was for me to divorce him. You see, I loved him that much that I wanted him to have a chance at real happiness, even if that happiness wasn't with me.

Tears fell on my ink blotter as I tried to push the idea of Webster's upcoming second wedding out of my head. Yvonne already has two children, I thought. Webster must be in heaven. And it looks like he's smartened up a bit. Getting married next month, in June. I guess he had

learned his lesson, not taking a chance to marry in May like we did.

"Marry in May and you'll rue the day," my superstitious grandmother had warned me before Webster and I got married. I didn't believe in old wives' tales and had told her so.

"Even so, better not to chance it," she said. How I wished I would have listened to her. Anything for a chance for things to be different. But then again, anytime I had wondered if I did the right thing (and that was often), I always came back to the same conclusion: Webster's best chance at happiness is with a woman who can provide him a family. He was miserable in our marriage after he found out that I couldn't have children. Truly loving him meant letting him go.

Now Webster could have all the happiness he could handle with his ready-made family, Yvonne and her two children plus any children that they might have together.

Good on him, I told myself. *Get over it and move on.*

Only problem was that I didn't know where to move on to. All my heart seemed to know was Webster. Every time my friends tried to set me up with someone, I turned down the offer because I felt as though I would be unfaithful to Webster in some weird way.

I hadn't even spoken to him since the embarrassing smoothie incident where I made a total fool of myself. I didn't want my relationship with Webster to be forever marred by that last humiliating experience but at the same time, I didn't think I could stand to see him again.

I tried to push the mess away from my mind and somehow got through the day and finished working on my accounts. When I left the office and walked to my car that night, I quickly beelined to my car to avoid my friends. I felt that if I saw their sympathetic faces, I would start to break down and cry. And that wouldn't help anything.

I drew a hot bath, put on soothing music and dang it all, the tears came anyway. So much so that I nearly feared the tub would overflow. I went to sleep that night determined not to dream about Webster and I

reuniting, just as I had every night since our divorce.

Of course in the morning I remembered my dream and knew that I had failed. But it wasn't a fantasy-type dream, it was more like a nightmare. In the dream, I was holding onto tiny sweet babies, two of them. I looked up to see Webster coming over. He wrapped his arms around us and kissed me.

"I love you," he whispered to me. "Always have. Always will."

Then I heard another voice but it wasn't sweet like Webster's.

"Another big surprise?"

In the dream, I looked up, startled to see Yvonne coming towards us.

"Give me those babies!" she yelled at me. "Give me my husband!"

Right then and there, I understood what had needed to happen. I had to get over Webster quick before this turned into an obsession that took over my life. I was dreaming about Webster and Yvonne's wedding and their future babies! This had to stop for my own good.

Over the next couple of weeks, I tried everything to make a fresh start. I took our old wedding photo album, all photos and little mementos of our relationship and stored them in boxes that I dropped off at my grandmother's house to put in her garage. I tried reading interesting books that had nothing to do with love or relationships before bed, watched funny shows, even turned the bed in a different direction, just so that I could get myself to stop dreaming of Webster.

But it was no use. To make matters worse, each dream seemed to be more and more detailed. More and more urgent each time.

Finally, I confessed everything to my friends. Erica hugged me, Devin looked at my sympathetically and it was Dominic who suggested that I see a hypnotist.

"That's a fabulous idea, Dominic!" I said and made an appointment for the following evening. Devin, Erica and Dominic said that they would go along with me for moral support. I couldn't wait for it, I just wanted all

(Continued on page 42) 39

SCRUMPTIOUS

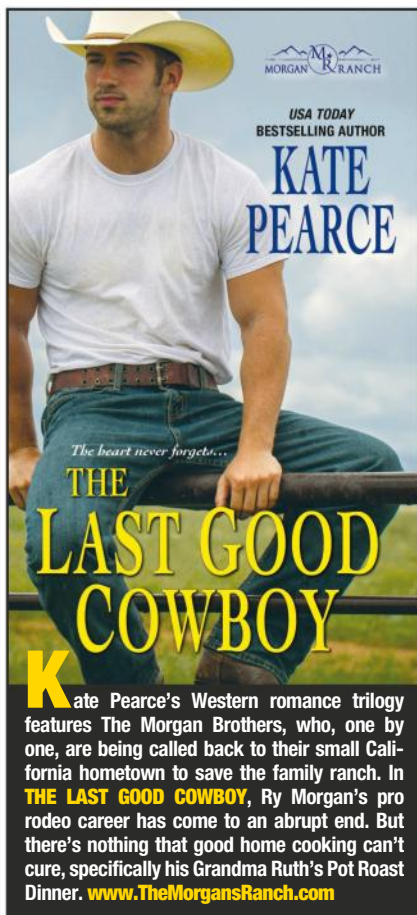
RECIPES FROM KENSINGTON'S SWEET AND SEXY

SUMMER ROMANCES

Ruth's Pot Roast for Ry

from **THE LAST GOOD COWBOY**
by Kate Pearce

- 4-5 pounds whole chuck roast
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 onions
- 6-8 carrots
- salt (optional)
- pepper to taste
- 1 cup red wine (optional, you can use beef broth instead)
- 2-3 cups beef stock
- 3 sprigs fresh thyme, or dried
- 3 sprigs fresh rosemary, or dried



Kate Pearce's Western romance trilogy features The Morgan Brothers, who, one by one, are being called back to their small California hometown to save the family ranch. In **THE LAST GOOD COWBOY**, Ry Morgan's pro rodeo career has come to an abrupt end. But there's nothing that good home cooking can't cure, specifically his Grandma Ruth's Pot Roast Dinner. www.TheMorgansRanch.com

First and foremost, choose a nicely marbled piece of meat. This will enhance the flavor of your pot roast like nothing else. Generously salt and pepper your chuck roast. Heat a large pot or Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Then add 2 to 3 tablespoons of olive oil (or you can do a butter/olive oil split). Cut two onions in half and cut carrots into 2-inch slices. When the oil in the pot is very hot (but not smoking), add in the halved onions, browning them on one side and then the other. Remove the onions to a plate. Throw the carrots into the same very hot pan and toss them around a bit until slightly browned, about a minute or so. Place the meat in the pan and sear it for about a minute on all sides until it is nice and brown all over. Remove the roast to a plate. With the burner still on high, use either red wine or beef broth (about 1 cup) to deglaze the pan, scraping the bottom with a whisk to get all the flavor up. When the bottom of the pan is sufficiently deglazed, place the roast back into the pan and add enough beef stock to cover the meat halfway (about 2 to 3 cups). Add in the onion and the carrots, as well as rosemary and thyme. Put the lid on, then roast in a 275F oven for 3 hours (for a 3-pound roast). For a 4 to 5-pound roast, plan on 4 hours.

Delicious recipes from our friends at Kensington Publishing



There's a lot of barbecuing in **FALLING HARD**, especially when the wranglers on Rosser Ranch come in from riding the range. Here in California, where the book takes place, we make something called Santa Maria style tri-tip. It's a small triangular muscle from the bottom sirloin cut of the cow or steer. It's grilled over red oak chips the way the cowboys used to do it in the 1800s. Logan Jenkins, the hero, gets his first taste of the succulent beef while learning about his heritage. Here's the recipe.

Tri Tips

From **FALLING HARD** by Stacy Finz

- 2-3 pounds beef tri-tip
- 2 tablespoons garlic powder
- 2 tablespoons kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- 2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
- Parsley to taste (or you can just use Pappy's Choice Seasoning)

In small bowl, mix spices, Worcestershire sauce and parsley and rub well into meat. Let stand for 30 minutes at room temperature. Soak 2 cups red oak chips in water for at least 20 minutes. Light a medium-size fire on one side of a gas or charcoal barbecue. Add chips to the fire and set the tri-tip over it, fat side up and brown well with the lid closed for about 5 minutes. Then turn over and brown the other side. Move meat slightly away from the fire, cover, and turn every 10 minutes, until a meat thermometer inserted into thickest part of the roast reaches 125 to 130 degrees. It'll take 25 to 35 minutes. Let the meat rest with a foil tent over it for about 15 minutes before slicing across the grain. Serve with pinto beans, garlic bread and a salad.



Not-Really-Vegan Turkey Casserole

from **A COLDWATER WARM HEARTS WEDDING** by Lexi Eddings

Crust:

- 1 9" x 12" baking pan
- 2 cups Crisco
- dash of salt
- 4 cups flour
- 16 tablespoons water (to make it fit the larger pan, my mom just doubles her single pie crust recipe, which calls for 8 tablespoons of water. FYI: 16 tablespoons equals 1 cup.)

Filling:

Leftover noodles with thickened broth (Use the noodle recipe on page 316 of **A Coldwater Warm Hearts Wedding**, and they'll be just right!)

Peas

Diced carrots (optional)

Leftover turkey, cut into bite-sized pieces (NOT optional!)

Mix noodles, peas, carrots, and turkey (especially the turkey. Do NOT forget the turkey!) in a large bowl. Set aside. In a mixing bowl,



A COLDWATER WARM HEARTS WEDDING

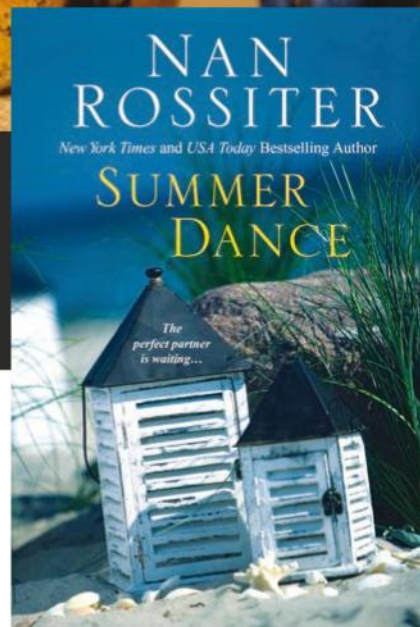
"A unique take on what it means to go home again."
—Kristan Higgins, *New York Times* bestselling author

LEXI EDDINGS

Charming and heart-warming, *A Coldwater Warm Hearts Wedding* brings readers back to the quaint small town of Coldwater Cove, Oklahoma, where you can fill up on delicious comfort food and gossip at the center of the community, the Green Apple Grill. Shirley Evans, one of the characters in *A Coldwater Warm Hearts Wedding*, forgets to add the turkey to her turkey casserole, thereby transforming it into a vegan dish. If you skip the reminders in this recipe, yours can be vegan too! www.LexiEddings.com



Summer Dance by New York Times and USA Today bestselling author Nan Rossiter is a powerful, heartwarming love story that bridges past and present to explore the story of a family in Nantucket. At the center of the love story is Sally Adams, a writer and owner of "Cuppa Jo to Go," a Nantucket mainstay and bake shop where her blueberry muffins are a local favorite. www.NanRossiter.com



Sally's Blueberry Muffins

from **SUMMER DANCE** by Nan Rossiter

- 1¾ cups all-purpose flour
- 2/3 cup sugar
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- 6 tablespoons softened butter
- 1 egg
- ½ cup milk
- 1 teaspoon lemon zest
- ½ teaspoon vanilla
- 1 cup fresh blueberries

combine Crisco, salt, and a cup or so of flour. Gently mix. (This means "by hand.") Add some of the water and more flour (by no means all!), being careful not to overstir or beat. Go by feel until the dough is cohesive enough to pour out onto a floured board. Knead more flour into it. (I have been strongly cautioned NOT to work the dough too much. You want the ingredients blended but not flogged into toughness. Also, my mother confesses she doesn't mix all the flour the recipe calls for into the dough. Some of it is used to roll out the crusts.) Divide the dough into two balls, a larger one for the bottom of the 9" x 13" baking pan and a small one that will be the top crust. Roll to a one-eighth-inch thickness. (Here's a tip from my mom: Once you have the dough rolled out, fold it over to lift it up and into the baking pan. Make sure there's enough to go up the sides and hang over the lip a bit.) Use a fork to poke holes in the bottom and sides of the crust. Fill the bottom crust with the noodle, peas, carrots, and turkey mixture. Cut two curved slits in the top crust before you cover the noodles, peas, carrots, and turkey. (This is your last chance to make sure you didn't forget the turkey!) Flute the edges of the dough to join the top and bottom halves as if you were making a pie. (Now that I think about it, I wonder why my family has always called this a turkey casserole when it's clearly a turkey potpie! Oh, well . . . whatever you call it, it'll still taste good.) Bake at 350 degrees for 50–55 minutes until golden brown.

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Grease 12 cup muffin pan. In a large bowl, mix flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt. With a pastry blender, cut in butter until mix resembles fine crumbs. In small bowl, beat until blended egg, milk, lemon zest, and vanilla. Stir egg mix into flour mix until moistened. Fold blueberries into batter. Spoon batter into muffin-pan cups. Bake 20-25 minutes until golden or toothpick comes out clean. Serve warm!

Rebuilding Our Love

(Continued from page 39)

of this to be over. Maybe I still had a shot at love. There had to be someone else out there who was okay with not having children. And once my mind was able to let go of Webster, I would be able to at least give dating a chance.

That night, I stopped by the supermarket to pick up a spaghetti squash and pasta sauce. It was Webster's favorite quick, easy dinner that I used to make for him all the time and I just wanted to have it again once more before my memory was wiped clean of him and our past.

He had taught me how to pick the perfect squash. "Not too small and not too pale," he'd say. "And just the right shade of yellow."

I sighed, looking at the squashes in the big basket in the produce department. When I felt my heart ache, I willed myself to buck up. Maybe I would meet someone sooner than I thought and wouldn't be lonely for much longer.

"Sydney, is that you?"

I looked up and felt my heart thump wildly.

"Webster!" I said. "What are you doing here?" I was shocked. I had purposely chosen to shop at a grocery store that we never used while together just so that I wouldn't run into him.

He laughed. "The same thing as you," he said. "Picking out a good squash."

For a moment, everything between us felt so friendly and natural, just as it had always been even after the divorce but suddenly, right there in the grocery store, the air turned cold and thick.

I heard high heels clicking on the grocery store linoleum and didn't have to turn around to know that Yvonne was behind me.

"Well," she said, coming over to Webster's side and giving me a look that more sneer than smile. "What a big surprise."

"Yvonne," Webster said, oblivious to her attitude towards me. "Look who I found! Sydney is making spaghetti squash, too."

"What a darling coincidence,"

Yvonne said, looping her arm into Webster's and giving me a smug grin.

"Sydney, you always did make it so perfect," he said. "I hope I can follow your example."

Now I laughed. "Hardly! All I did was toss it in the oven. Picking out the right squash is what's key."

He smiled at me and my knees went weak. Oh goodness, how much longer would I have to suffer like this? Tomorrow's appointment couldn't come soon enough.

Webster winked at me and looked over the squash display.

"Remember," he said. "Not too small and not too pale."

"And just the right shade of yellow," we said at the same time.

With that, Yvonne ripped her arm away from Webster and crossed her arms over her chest, looking at us as if she'd been scammed.

"Here you are," Webster said, hefting a perfect-looking squash into my basket. "Enjoy."

He picked one for himself and I tried to ignore Yvonne's glare as much as possible.

"Webby," she huffed. "We have to be going. We have wedding plans to discuss. And to look at properties for our new home. Lots to do, busy busy! Now pick out your piece of fruit and let's go!"

"Vegetable, Yvonne," he said. "Spaghetti squash is a vegetable and it's one of my favorite dishes for dinner when I'm in a hurry."

"Okay, fine," she said, dismissively and made the hurry-up motion with her hand.

"Y-You're moving?" I asked. I felt the blood drain from my face.

Webster looked at me sorrowfully. "Yvonne's family is on the East Coast. For the sake of the kids, it's best if we..."

I didn't hear the rest of what he said. Blood was rushing in my ears and I felt like I was going to be sick.

The slick smile Yvonne was shooting me wasn't helping matters, either.

"Oh, that makes sense," I said. "Well, I'm sure you'll be happy out there." Webster had always wanted a big family. Now he would have everything he ever wanted.

"I'd better get going," I said. "Congratulations to you both again."

"Sydney—" Webster stepped forward as I started to walk away but Yvonne reached out and held him back, waving to me with her other hand.

I went right for the check-out line, forgetting the pasta sauce. As soon as I got to my car, I let out a good, long scream before driving home. It occurred to me on the way back what a perfect situation this was shaping up to be. I wouldn't have to worry about Webster anymore. After tomorrow, I would be free of thinking about him and pretty soon, I wouldn't have to worry about running into him, either. He would be off living his happy life on the East Coast with Queen Yvonne and I would be living my life over here, whatever that meant. But as long as I wasn't thinking (or dreaming) about Webster, it had to be better than this.

All through the next day at work, I could barely think of anything else other than Webster and my appointment. I was so ready to stop hurting but even so, a little piece of me wondered if I would be sadder without my memories of Webster.

"You've got this," Dominic told me, later that day as the four of us walked into the hypnotist's office.

"And we're here for you," Erica said.

"For whatever you might need," Devin added.

Before I went to the check-in counter, I gave each of my dear friends a tremendous hug.

"Thank you so much for being here for me," I told them. "You're the best friends a girl could ask for. I don't think I could have gotten through this without you."

The appointment consisted of me telling the hypnotist what was bothering me—my constant thoughts about Webster and the nightmares and what I wanted to see happen as an end result—to clear my mind of Webster and move on for a new start.

He had me lay down and relax, and to be honest, I don't remember

anything else until he said, "Now open your eyes. You're awake."

I felt refreshed and energized but when I sat up and looked across the room at my friends, their faces were wide-eyed and saddened. Maybe even a little shocked.

I turned to the hypnotist. "Am I cured?" I asked.

He lifted a shoulder. "The mind is a funny thing," he said. "You mentioned several things about your ex while you were under. I specialize in helping people quit addictions, including love addictions. But the heart... well, that's a different matter entirely. Not my area of expertise."

My hopes sank. "I'll never get over him," I said softly.

"Come on, Syd," Devin said, putting his arm around me. "We'll get you home."

"Time heals all. That's what you need," Erica told me in the car.

"Just don't give up," Dominic said. "The wound is still fresh."

They offered to stay with me but I sent them home to their significant others. They needed to be with them and I needed some time alone. I needed to think. I spent the night worrying that Webster was my one chance at true love and I had sent him away, not because I didn't love him or he didn't love me but because of some biological error that I had no control over. It just wasn't fair!

I woke up with a shock and looked at the clock on my bedside table. It was 7:00 on a Saturday morning. I usually slept in until 9:00 on Saturdays. Something was on my mind and I lay in bed until I remembered the awful dream that I had.

I was in a wedding dress walking down an aisle. Webster was at the end of the aisle and had his arms outstretched. I began to run towards him when suddenly I was tackled by Yvonne, who was wearing an identical wedding dress!

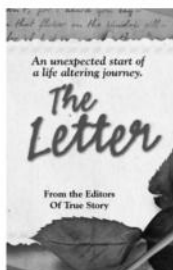
"Go away!" she screamed. "He's mine! Leave us alone!"

I pushed her off and tried running to Webster again but the aisle kept getting longer and longer, the faster I ran. It kept stretching out before me, never-ending. It was no use to keep up. But if I slowed down,

(Continued on page 47)

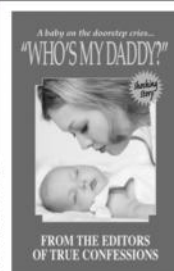
NEW FROM THE *TRUES* EDITORS FEATURE LENGTH STORIES IN PRINT

Novellas from *True Story* and *True Confessions* are now available individually in print!



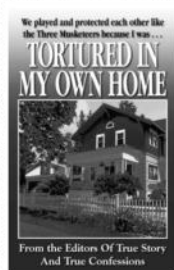
THE LETTER is a heartbreaking story of a woman named Annie who receives an urgent letter from her grandmother calling her back home. You will weep along side Annie as she discovers secrets of her family's past.

\$6 + \$3.99 S&H =
\$9.99 TOTAL



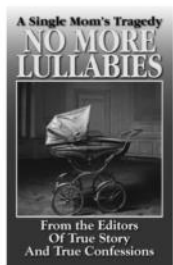
WHO'S MY DADDY? is the dramatic story of an abandoned baby that will keep you guessing the father's identity as you meet the six couples involved in the mystery. As the story unfolds, you'll be dying to find out, "who's the daddy?"

\$6 + \$3.99 S&H =
\$9.99 TOTAL



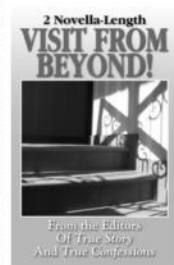
TORTURED IN MY OWN HOME is the story of a brother and sister living with a mentally ill mother, whose abuse threatens to destroy their lives. Join them on their journey together, and find out what the future holds for these poor little souls.

\$6 + \$3.99 S&H =
\$9.99 TOTAL



NO MORE LULLABIES is the story of Hilary, a teenager who shocks her parents and boyfriend with the news of her pregnancy, but who bravely chooses to continue her journey to motherhood despite the odds against her.

\$6 + \$3.99 S&H =
\$9.99 TOTAL



VISIT FROM BEYOND features two other-worldly tales from *True Story's* popular "Visit From Beyond" feature that will blur the line between the usual human experience and the great unknown, expanding your horizons and piquing your curiosity.

\$6 + \$3.99 S&H =
\$9.99 TOTAL

ORDER FIVE FOR \$30.00 and we'll pay your shipping and handling!
For US Shipping Only. Canadian orders must add \$15.00

(PLEASE PRINT)

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____ APT: _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____ PHONE #: _____

PAYMENT ENCLOSED Canadian & Foreign Customers: Please use either major credit cards or Western Union money orders in US dollars only. Please make checks and money orders payable to True Renditions, LLC. Add \$15.00 for Canadian and foreign postage.

Please place this entire form in an envelope and mail to:
TRUE RENDITIONS, LLC
105 E. 34TH STREET
SUITE 141
NEW YORK, NY 10016

CHARGE MY CREDIT CARD:

VISA MASTERCARD AMERICAN EXPRESS DISCOVER

ACCT# _____ EXPIRATION _____

SIGNATURE _____

Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery. Credit card payments for your books will appear on your statement as True Renditions LLC, not as the book name. All previous book offers from former publisher(s) are null and void.

MIRACLE OF FAITH

Mini-Story

If you would like to share your own **MIRACLE OF FAITH** with *True Story* readers, email your manuscript to trueswriters@yahoo.com Please indicate whether

you wish your full name or initials used. Manuscripts cannot be returned or acknowledged. Please keep a duplicate copy for your records.

FATHER'S DAY BLESSING

Strength and Warmth

Dear Lord God, my Savior,
I pray that You spread the love and guidance shared with Your Son, Jesus, onto all the fathers—old and new.

Please bless them with the strength to serve as a strong role model like You have served for all of the world.

Allow men to learn from Your example of undying love and



understanding.

In Your Name, I pray this for all fathers and soon-to-be fathers.

Amen, blessings to all!

—Mandy G., Texas



NEW!

EDITORS' FAVORITES VOL. 1
Editors pick the best love stories, tragedies and tales of inspiration.

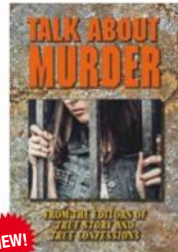
\$10 + \$3.99 S&H = **\$13.99 TOTAL**

BOOKS IN PRINT!

From the editors of
True Story & True Confessions

PICK 6
for **FREE SHIPPING!**

Order form, details &
MORE BOOKS
on the back of this page...



NEW!

TALK ABOUT MURDER
Read about escaped prisoners, deadly daughters and homicidal husbands.

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H = **\$13.99 TOTAL**



NEW!

TRUE MEMORIES
Treasured memories, flashbacks and recollections of times gone by.

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H = **\$13.99 TOTAL**



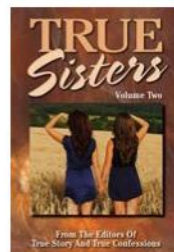
UNTRUE
Tantalizing tales of shameless cheaters and serial two-timers

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H = **\$13.99 TOTAL**



TRUE SISTERS VOLUME I
Sisters with different personalities and relationships, and their journeys together.

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H = **\$13.99 TOTAL**



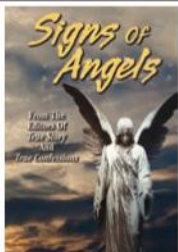
TRUE SISTERS VOLUME II
Sibling rivalry, unconditional love, deep resentment and lifelong friendship.

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H = **\$13.99 TOTAL**



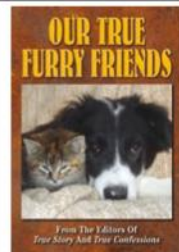
DELIVERED INTO DANGER
Shocking, suspenseful stories of babies and mothers in danger of being separated.

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H = **\$13.99 TOTAL**



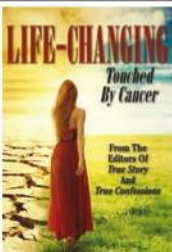
SIGNS OF ANGELS
Everyday human angels in terrible times to guide us through life.

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H = **\$13.99 TOTAL**



OUR TRUE FURRY FRIENDS
Four-footed furry friends saving lives and teaching us friendship

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H = **\$13.99 TOTAL**



LIFE-CHANGING-TOUCHED BY CANCER

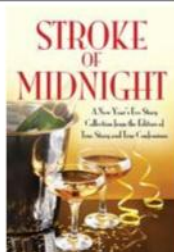
Experiences of cancer patients and their families

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H = **\$13.99 TOTAL**



LITTLE BABY LOST
Stories of women suffering their worst nightmares to keep their babies safe.

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H = **\$13.99 TOTAL**



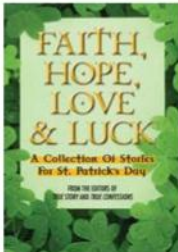
STROKE OF MIDNIGHT
New Year's Eve tales of resolutions, relationships, romance and revelry!

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H = **\$13.99 TOTAL**



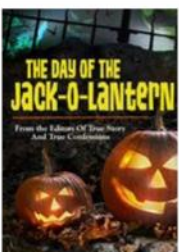
VALENTINE'S DELIGHT
Like a box of chocolates this collection offers a variety of Valentine's Day treats!

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H = **\$13.99 TOTAL**



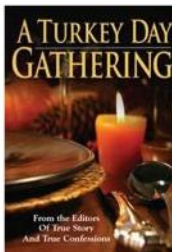
FAITH, HOPE, LOVE & LUCK
The symbols of the four-leaf clover fill this festive St. Patrick's Day collection.

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H = **\$13.99 TOTAL**



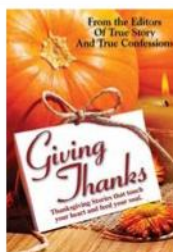
JACK-O-LANTERN
A one-of-a-kind collection of Halloween stories that will scare you, thrill you!

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H = **\$13.99 TOTAL**



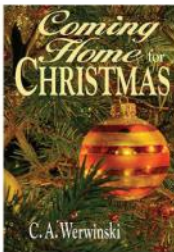
A TURKEY DAY GATHERING
Thanksgiving stories of people coming together, despite their differences.

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H = **\$13.99 TOTAL**



GIVING THANKS
Thanksgiving stories of people helping each other to renew your faith in humanity.

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H = **\$13.99 TOTAL**



COMING HOME FOR CHRISTMAS
Stories about family and the Christmas spirit.

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H = **\$13.99 TOTAL**



ONE WINTER NIGHT
Stories that capture the parties, presents and spirit of the holiday season.

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H = **\$13.99 TOTAL**



PARTING WAYS
For anyone who knows first hand that breaking up is hard to do.

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H = **\$13.99 TOTAL**



SHATTERED VOWS
Tales of the trials and tribulations of broken marriage and divorce.

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H = **\$13.99 TOTAL**



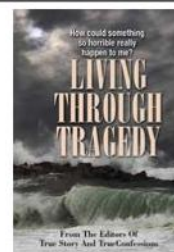
BRIDES: FROM BLUSHING TO BAWLING
Wedding highs and lows, and big day disasters!

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H = **\$13.99 TOTAL**



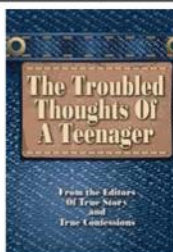
JEALOUS OBSESSIONS
Stories of jealousy reaching the point of obsession, and becoming dangerous.

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H = **\$13.99 TOTAL**



LIVING THROUGH TRAGEDY
Stories of suffering through hard times, and surviving some unthinkable horrors.

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H = **\$13.99 TOTAL**



THE TROUBLED THOUGHTS OF A TEENAGER
Teens on drugs, pregnant, homeless and beyond.

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H = **\$13.99 TOTAL**



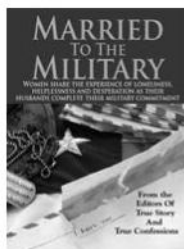
Books In Print From The Editors Of True Story and True Confessions!

START YOUR COLLECTION WITH 6 FOR \$60!



GRANDMA KNOWS BEST
Reminiscences familiar to anyone who knew their grandmother.

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H = **\$13.99 TOTAL**



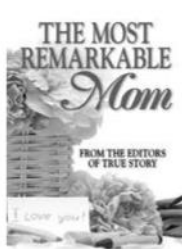
MARRIED TO THE MILITARY
Military wives share their experience of loneliness, helplessness and desperation.

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H = **\$13.99 TOTAL**



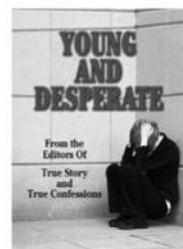
SECOND CHANCES
Tales of those who've lost love, suffered heartbreak and found redemption.

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H = **\$13.99 TOTAL**



THE MOST REMARKABLE MOM
Stories of motherhood; amazing moms and their grateful children.

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H = **\$13.99 TOTAL**



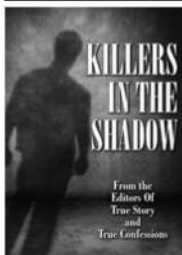
YOUNG AND DESPERATE
True-life stories exposing the deep, dark secrets of young adults.

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H = **\$13.99 TOTAL**



SCANDALOUS SECRETS
Hidden addictions, past misfortunes and shameful personal issues exposed!

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H = **\$13.99 TOTAL**



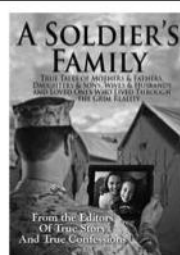
KILLERS IN THE SHADOW
See the world through the eyes of a killer in these chilling tales.

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H = **\$13.99 TOTAL**



ENCHANTING EASTER
Get inspired by Easter-themed stories of new beginnings.

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H = **\$13.99 TOTAL**



A SOLDIER'S FAMILY
True tales of the grim and always dangerous life of a soldier's family.

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H = **\$13.99 TOTAL**



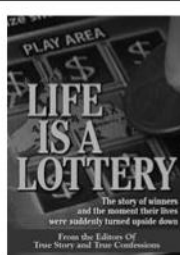
THE GREAT MAKEOVER: BECOMING CINDERELLA
Just how much these ladies willing to pay for fairytale beauty?

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H = **\$13.99 TOTAL**



HOPE FOR THE HEART
Happily-ever-afters and other ways that Cupid can pierce our hearts.

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H = **\$13.99 TOTAL**



LIFE IS A LOTTERY
How many winners' lives are suddenly turned upside down.

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H = **\$13.99 TOTAL**

ORDER SIX FOR \$60.00 and we'll pay your shipping and handling!
For US Shipping Only. Canadian orders must add \$15.00

NAME: _____ (PLEASE PRINT)

ADDRESS: _____ APT: _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____ PHONE #: _____

PAYMENT ENCLOSED Canadian & Foreign Customers: Please use either major credit cards or Western Union money orders in US dollars only. Please make checks and money orders payable to True Renditions, LLC. Add \$15.00 for Canadian and foreign postage.

Please place this entire form in an envelope and mail to:
TRUE RENDITIONS, LLC
105 E. 34TH STREET
SUITE 141
NEW YORK, NY 10016

CHARGE MY CREDIT CARD:

VISA MASTERCARD AMERICAN EXPRESS DISCOVER

ACCT# _____ EXPIRATION _____

SIGNATURE _____

Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery. Credit card payments for your books will appear on your statement as True Renditions LLC, not as the book name. All previous book offers from former publisher(s) are null and void.



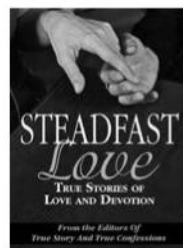
PAINFUL LOVE
The enduring lessons learned from difficult relationships.

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H = **\$13.99 TOTAL**



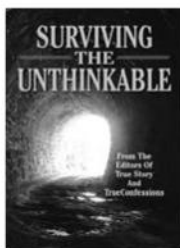
SECRETS REVEALED
Shameful secrets can almost always be exposed!

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H = **\$13.99 TOTAL**



STEADFAST LOVE
Through terrible tragedies, and tests, these women stand by their loved ones.

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H = **\$13.99 TOTAL**



SURVIVING THE UNTHINKABLE
Overcoming what you think could never happen to you.

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H = **\$13.99 TOTAL**



Rebuilding Our Love

(Continued from page 43)

Yvonne was right behind me. That's when I woke up in a panic.

I pulled the blankets over my head and groaned. Would this nightmare ever stop?

I got dressed, ate breakfast, packed my flannel pajamas in the car and headed to my grandmother's house.

Once there, she told me I looked terrible.

"You're a mess," she said. "What's wrong with you?" She never was one to mince words.

I told her that I needed to store more things in her garage. Then I finally broke down and told her about the nightmares, about running into Webster, the hypnotist and everything.

"Sydney," she said, cupping my face in her hand. "You listen to me. Life is too short to carry on without proper closure, you take it from me. Go to Webster. Tell Miss High and Mighty to take a hike if she's there. You were a huge part of Webster's life and your marriage didn't end right. You two owe it to each other to talk things out, just make sure that you leave things without unanswered questions. If questions do come up, answer them right away!"

I knew in my heart she was right. We had never really done that. I guess I never really thought that Webster would agree to sign the divorce papers, even though I had pushed hard for them. And when he did, I knew that it was really over between us.

"It would feel good to talk about things that I never got the chance to say before he gets married," I said.

"Go," she said, already shooing me out the door.

I was already on the way to Webster's when I rang his cell. I had no idea if Yvonne was living in the apartment Webster rented after the divorce or not. If she was there, I would tell her that I needed to talk to my ex-husband in private. After all, she was going to have him all to herself for the rest of her life. All I wanted was a few minutes.

"Hello?" a sleepy voice answered.

My heart sped up. "Webster, it's me," I said. "We need to talk."

"Sydney?" he asked, groggily.

"Can I meet you at your apartment?"

"Um, sure," he said. "That's... fine. Is everything okay?"

"Yes," I said. "It will be. Be there in ten minutes."

I pumped myself up for the rest of the ride, mentally going over all of the things that I wanted to say. I would have just one shot at this. Soon, he would be a married stepfather and father to be living far away and I would probably never see him again.

I choked back tears and parked my car.

I practically ran to his apartment and knocked on the door.

He opened it, still in his pajamas.

"Come in, come in," he said, a worried look on his face. "Are you all right?"

I scanned the apartment for any signs of a woman living there but everything I saw looked like bachelor living.

"Yvonne doesn't live here with you?" I asked.

He laughed. "No way," he said. "She said that this place was a dump and she'd barely step a toe in here."

I shook my head. What was my sweet Webster doing with a woman like her?

"So what's up?" he asked, sitting on the sofa and patting the seat next to him.

"There's just some things that I wanted to get off my chest," I said, drawing in a deep breath. "Before it's too late. You know, before you move and start your new life. Our marriage ended funny, Webster, and I want to make sure that we both get proper closure."

He nodded. "It did end funny."

"Webster, I—" I stopped myself and furiously blinked back tears. "I asked for the divorce because I wanted you to be happy. And I knew that I couldn't give you what you needed to be happy. Now you've found someone who can make you happy, and I'm glad for you. But I am having a hard time moving on and I think it's because we have unfinished

business. I think it would help to—"

"Wait, wait, wait," Webster said, holding up his hands. "You asked for the divorce because you wanted me to be happy?"

I nodded, not wanting to be interrupted. I wanted to get everything out as soon as possible while I still had the courage.

"So I think it would be beneficial for both of us to talk through—"

"Hold on a sec, Sydney," he said. "Is that the only reason?"

"Reason?" I asked.

"The only reason you asked, you pushed so hard for the divorce?"

"Of course, Webster, I know how much you want to be a father and I—"

"Sydney!" Webster practically yelled. He looked upset. "Yes, I want children, very much! But if I couldn't have them with you, then I would have been the happiest childless man on Earth."

I looked up, stunned. I was speechless. "But, but—"

"I didn't want to get divorced for anything, Sydney," he said. "But you pushed it so hard, I thought that you were sick of me. I didn't want to be the guy who refused to stand in your way."

"Way of what?" I asked, tears streaming down my face. "I've been a complete wreck ever since we signed those papers. I've been having nightmares nonstop. I even went to see a hypnotist just to try to get over you."

"Oh sweetheart, come here already," he said and pulled me into his arms. I breathed in his wonderful scent and cried more.

"And how was the result?" he asked me once I had stopped crying.

"Result?" I asked.

"Of the hypnosis," he said.

I shook my head and told him what the hypnotist had told me. "He said that it was a matter of the heart. Apparently, under his spell, I did nothing except talk about you and us and how I wished we could get back together."

"Me too," Webster said, wiping my tears. "It's a matter of the heart for me, too."

"But it's too late, isn't it?" I asked. "You've got plans to get married

and move—”

“Baby,” Webster said, hugging me tightly. “I was so lonely. After the divorce, all I did was think of you. I thought if I moved on, moved far away, things would get better. But I know they never would have.”

I drove back home ten minutes later. Alone. I spent the day fixing up the house and drove to the store for a jar of pasta sauce. When I got home, I cooked the spaghetti squash and took a shower. I put on an old favorite dress of mine and took the squash out of the oven. It was cooked to perfection.

I was just scooping it into a bowl when the doorbell rang. Webster stood on the porch, looking as handsome as ever.

“Smells delicious in here,” he said, stepping inside.

“It does,” I said, breathing in his aftershave/peppermint scent.

“Smells like home,” he said. He took my hand in his. “I did it, Sydney. I spent the day talking to Yvonne, telling her it was over. She... well, she didn’t take it well. Called me all kinds of names. But she ended up telling me that she’s had her eye on someone else anyway. I don’t know if she said that to hurt me or she meant it, but either way, it’s over.”

“I’m sorry it was difficult,” I said. “It sounds rough.”

“To tell you the truth,” he said. “It was the easiest thing I’ve ever done.”

I smiled at him and served him his dinner.

We ate holding hands, and I was still smiling so much it hurt as I loaded the dishwasher later that night.

That was two years ago and Webster and I have since remarried. And no, we did not get remarried in May! Our relationship is better than ever now since we promised to always communicate our feelings to each other, no matter what we think the other will feel about what we say. We can’t afford any silly misunderstandings now. But these days, our feelings are pretty transparent. Just pure ecstasy. We’re expecting twins by the end of the year. “Double time,” I told Webster. “To make up for the time we lost.” ■

April Showers

(Continued from page 15)

with a slurred, “I’m proud of you, honey. Be a doll and refill my drink, will you?”

So was it any wonder that after my modeling career took off that I was able to send myself to college. And in the middle of all that, I met Taylor and did my utmost to give our children the stable, loving home I never had. And most of all, to give them a mom and dad who really loved each other.

My therapist tried to help me work through the scars from my childhood that I still carried with me, wounds that festered and stung with my second divorce. Even with my successful modeling career and my children, I didn’t feel complete without a man at my side. Without true love. I still felt rejected and unloved. That little girl still lived inside me who had to be strong and not cry over her parents’ divorce cried out daily. The little girl who only wanted to be loved and for love to never go away.

So here I was meandering through a county craft fair, looking, searching for answers and possibly for that missing piece of my soul when I spied some paintings on black velvet. One jumped out at me. A vibrant hummingbird against the dark canvas, its wings a blur. I had never seen one at night. I’m not sure if they do fly after dark, but I guess that’s why it captivated me: it wasn’t the way it was supposed to be. It was doing the unexpected. And it was beautiful.

“This is wonderful,” I said to the woman minding the booth. “I attended an art institute, but I could never paint something this amazing. Did you paint this?”

“No, my husband did,” she said, gesturing to a man in a wheelchair who was talking to other customers.

I studied the man for a moment. He didn’t seem able to move his arms. “How does he paint?”

She smiled. “He holds the brush in his teeth.” She placed a brush in her mouth to demonstrate. “He was

in a swimming accident ten years ago. He’s paralyzed from the shoulders down, but that hasn’t stopped him. He accepted it and worked out a new way to paint.”

Suddenly I was more intrigued with their story than the painting. “How long have you been married?”

“Almost thirty years.” She glanced at her husband who caught her gaze. They locked eyes for a few precious seconds like two people very much in love. Tears came to my eyes just watching them.

She turned back to me and studied me for a moment. I don’t know if she recognized me from my magazine ads or TV commercials, but I felt like she was looking into my soul. “My husband says painting gives him great joy and purpose. It’s an outward expression of his soul. It’s an uplifting experience. One of which I imagine you’ve experienced yourself.”

She handed me one of their business cards and a flier with fair dates and cities. “If you have paintings, you could always try to sell them at these craft fairs. They have them all over the state. We’d be glad to have you.” She winked and with a quick glance at the darkening sky, she began boxing up their paintings.

I turned away studying the flier. I had set aside my passion for painting for my family’s sake, putting their needs ahead of mine to create my childhood ideal of the perfect loving family which had only set me up chasing a false hope, but now I felt like this was a sign from God to give art my full heart. What my therapist had been trying to tell me finally hit me: I can’t be happy with someone else until I learned to be happy with myself, to be myself, to accept myself, imperfect as I am—a love that never goes away. I closed my eyes, turning my face up to the sky, feeling whole for the first time in my life with this warm, soothing revelation sinking into every fiber of my being.

Gentle cleansing raindrops splattered on my face, washing away the hurt, the anger, the confusion, the rejection, and the loneliness and filled it with hope as pure as this April shower. ■

BACK ISSUE



OF **TRUE STORY** AND **TRUE CONFESSIONS!**



TAKE SIX ISSUES

3 TRUE STORY and 3 TRUE CONFESSIONS And We Pick The Issue FOR **\$20.00 + \$7.00 for Shipping & Handling**

OR YOU PICK THE TITLE AND WE PICK THE ISSUE

True Story EACH **\$3.99 + \$2.50 for Shipping & Handling**

True Confessions EACH **\$3.99 + \$2.50 for Shipping & Handling**

Name _____

Address _____ Apt# _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email or Phone # _____

Charge my VISA MASTERCARD AMERICAN EXPRESS DISCOVER

ACCT # _____ Expiration _____

Signature _____

PAYMENT ENCLOSED
CHECK OR MONEY ORDER
 CANADIAN & FOREIGN ORDERS ADD **\$15.00** PER MAGAZINE.
US FUNDS ONLY.

Place entire form in envelope and mail to:
True Renditions
 105 E 34th Street, Suite 141
 New York, NY 10016

PLEASE NOTE: Credit card payments for your purchase will appear on your statement as True Renditions, not as the magazine name.

ALL PREVIOUS BACK ISSUE OFFERS ARE NULL AND VOID AFTER JULY 12, 2016

NEW!

TRUE STORY & True Confessions

ARE NOW AVAILABLE AS APPS FOR YOUR IPAD!



Subscribe to *True Story* and *True Confessions* and get the latest issue on your iPad every month, or purchase individual issues from 2012 to the present!

POWERED BY
MAZ™

Available on the iPad
App Store

Wedding Day Disaster

(Continued from page 19)

were dressed as if the rehearsal were a social event, but my father had come directly from work at the former auto parts warehouse and wore his work boots, jeans, and a black T-shirt with a heavy metal band's logo on the front.

I caught him as he hurried into the nave.

"Don't worry," he said. "The hall is ready. Mostly. They had just finished painting the men's room and were about to start on the women's restroom when I left."

Dewey's parents saw me talking to my father and approached. Mr. Winchester stuck out his hand and said, "Mr. Carter, I presume?"

My dad grasped his hand and they shook.

"Dad," I said, "these are Dewey's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Winchester."

"*Sylvia and Martin,*" Mr. Winchester said.

"*Scott,*" my father said.

"I'm surprised it's taken this long for us to meet," Dewey's mother said.

"Well, I'm glad we finally did." My father smiled as he grasped her hand for a moment before releasing it. "Lydia has said so many good things about you."

Mrs. Winchester glanced at me. "She has?"

"Absolutely."

Before my father could stretch his little white lie out much longer, I suggested we join the minister and the rest of the wedding party at the front of the nave.

Dewey stood with his best man, two groomsmen, and two ushers, while I joined my matron of honor, her son the ring bearer, and two bridesmaids. My father and Dewey's parents stood a little back from us, and the lead guitarist from the band we'd hired for the reception sat off to the side with an acoustical guitar straddling his knee. We all listened as the minister ran through the traditional wedding processional order and asked if we wanted to make any changes. We didn't.

He made us walk through it sev-

eral times, including once specifically to ensure that the guitarist recognized his cues. At the end of the fifth walk-through, he said, "I think you've got it."

As the groom's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Winchester were hosting the rehearsal dinner at a near-by Italian restaurant, so everyone except the guitarist, whose band had a gig at a dive bar later that evening, retired to the restaurant's back room. We all sat around a large table, copious amounts of food were presented family style, and the wine flowed freely. Dewey and I thanked everyone, and we presented small gifts to our bridesmaids, groomsmen, and ushers. Both my father and Mr. Winchester toasted us, and the best man made some rude comments we hoped he wouldn't repeat at the reception the next day.

Our friends kept Dewey and me busy, so I couldn't monitor the interaction between my father and Dewey's parents. They seemed to get along, but I didn't have a chance to talk to my father before my bridesmaids spirited me away to a bachelorette party at my matron of honor's apartment where they inundated me with sheer nightwear and sexual toys that I would be too embarrassed to show Dewey.

The church had a private room where the bridesmaids and I could prepare, so I left home early Saturday morning to have my hair done, and then I drove to the church, arriving long before anyone else was scheduled to arrive. I walked through the nave, ensured that everything was in order, and then ducked into the private room. My bridesmaids spent the morning decorating the reception hall, and they all drifted into the church after quick stops at home to shower.

They dressed, helped me with my dress, helped each other with their hair, and made lots of racy comments about my pending wedding night. I was the second of our group to marry, and the first not to wear a maternity gown while walking down the aisle. Even though I insisted Dewey and I planned to wait until we were settled, they all swore it

wouldn't be long, though, before I had my first child.

Before we realized how much time had passed, the minister tapped on the door to give us a fifteen-minute warning. We all gave each other a last once-over and then my father tapped on the door.

After one of the bridesmaids opened the door, my eyes opened wide in surprise. Other than in the photos in my parents' wedding album, I had never before seen my father in a tuxedo, and I realized for the first time what a handsome man he was.

"It's time," he said. "The ushers are seating the Winchesters now."

The bridesmaids filed out of the room and met the groomsmen in the vestibule so they could walk together down the aisle to where Dewey was waiting with the minister. There they separated and each stepped to the appropriate side. The ring-bearer's father was one of the ushers, so he gave his son the signal when it was time to follow the best man and matron of honor.

Then the guitarist began the bridal march, I hooked my hand in my father's arm, and we walked down the aisle to where my husband-to-be awaited me. I barely remember what happened after that, but I know when we were finally presented as husband and wife, tears of joy were spoiling my makeup and Dewey had a grin that nearly split his face in two.

We stood in the receiving line and thanked everyone who attended our wedding, then the wedding party returned to the nave for photographs before driving to the reception.

Everything had gone so smoothly to that point that I wasn't even thinking about how my wedding day could turn into a disaster.

But it did.

While the renovation of the auto parts warehouse had been a success, no one had thought to consider parking requirements for an event our size and many of our guests had to park several blocks away. I found myself apologizing to Dewey's great-grandparents and to

several other older couples on both sides of the family.

Then, in the midst of serving, the caterer brought a problem to my attention. I had ordered 121 plated meals, but the caterer had prepared 112, a transposition that left us nine short. Dewey and I chose not to eat. When my father learned of the problem, he also refused a meal, as did Dewey's parents, the best man, and the matron of honor. I'm not certain how the caterer fudged the other two meals, but by then I was upset that the liquor supplier had failed to deliver the three cases of champagne I ordered for the toast and that two toilets in the men's restroom had clogged and were overflowing.

While my father tackled the restroom problem, Mr. Winchester raced seven miles to the nearest liquor store, returned with three cases of champagne, and helped pop corks so everyone would have a flute in hand when we offered the toasts after dinner rather than before. My father finished with the men's room in time to join us, and I thought everything was under control again.

I was wrong. After dinner, Dewey signaled to the band and we had our first dance, followed by the father-bride dance. Halfway through the mother-groom dance, the drummer fell off the stage and sprained his wrist.

That was the last straw. All my hard work to ensure that everything was perfect was falling apart. I felt myself about to erupt in a fountain of tears, so I rushed into the women's restroom before anyone could see me.

I was staring into the mirror, dabbing at the corners of my eyes with a paper towel, trying to keep the tears from running down my face and ruining my make-up again, when the music resumed. I had no idea how the band had replaced the drummer so quickly, and I was doing my best to put myself together when my mother-in-law walked in.

"You never told us your father was a musician."

I stared at her reflection in the mirror.

"He's playing the drums."

"My father?" Only a moment passed before I put the pieces together—his love of music, the night job he had worked before my mother died, the dream he had given up so that I would never have to give up mine.

Mrs. Winchester nodded. Then she asked, "Are you okay?"

"I tried so hard to do everything right and now I've disappointed everyone." Tears again threatened to spill out so I quickly dabbed at the corners of my eyes.

"You haven't disappointed anyone."

"I've disappointed you," I said as I turned to face my mother-in-law. "I know you wanted your son to marry the perfect woman, and I'm far from perfect."

Surprising me, Mrs. Winchester gathered me in her arms and hugged me. "I always wanted my son to marry the woman who was perfect for him," she said. "That's you."

"Me? But I'm nothing like you, Mrs. Winchester," I insisted.

"And that's a good thing," she said. "My son doesn't need another mother. He needs a wife, a partner, a soul mate. He found all those things when he found you."

I was about to start crying again, but for a different reason.

"And stop calling me Mrs. Winchester. Call me Sylvia. Or Mom."

"Mom," I repeated. I liked the way that sounded. Even more, I liked what it meant. "I can do that, Mom."

"So, dry your tears, and let's get out there and party."

I pulled myself together and was ready to return to the reception when Mom had one more thing to add.

"The next time the community theater has an open casting call for a female character near my age, give me a heads up. If your father can pick up the drums again after all these years, maybe I can walk across the stage one more time."

I gave her a great big hug and knew that everything was going to be okay. ■

Doomed June Bride

(Continued from page 7)

"I'm not. Now if you'll excuse me, I'm starved and I still have to place my order."

The brunette tugged on Tyler's arm. "C'mon Tyler. Let's get out of here and go somewhere else."

Tyler pulled away from the clingy woman. "You go on. I have business here I need to tend to."

The woman frowned and left in a huff.

"New girlfriend, Tyler?"

"Nope. A coworker who keeps trying to insert herself into my life. I told her I was going to dinner and she invited herself along."

"What business do you need to take care of here?"

"I want to apologize for acting so childish. I should have given you the benefit of a doubt and not left the way I did."

"Yes. You should have, but I understand why you acted the way you did. I never intended to hurt you, Tyler. Seeing you again made me wake up to my true feelings for Billy."

"How did he take it?"

"About like you'd expect. His mother took it poorly too. I'm sure if my parents and I ran with the right crowd she would try to blackball us, but as it is there's nothing she can do but hurl insults and grind her teeth."

"One of those types, huh? I'm glad my Mom isn't that way. Can I buy you lunch as a way to make amends?"

"Yes. I'd really like that, Tyler."

Tyler told me he'd moved back to town to be closer to his parents. He'd taken a job at his dad's old company and liked it, except for the clingy brunette.

"Will you have dinner with me this weekend?"

"I'm free Saturday night." I didn't tell him that I was free every night.

That Saturday date was the first of many, and when June rolled around again, the two of us eloped to Vegas. I'd always wanted to be a June bride without the fuss of a big wedding. I had my dream wedding and a dreamy husband. What more could a girl want? ■

Stranger in the Mirror

(Continued from page 3)

"Are you ready to go?" He asked.

"Is this real?" Are you really here, Nathan, or am I dreaming?"

He grabbed my hand and led me out to his truck.

"Where are you taking me?"

"Over to a buddy's house. It's a good thing I found a job here in town and am moving back. I'm staying with him until I can find my own place."

We pulled up to a ranch style house and parked. "This is it. Wait right there and I'll help you out."

"Why is there a police car here?"

"I guess I didn't tell you that my buddy is a cop. I called Joel after I hauled your stuff out to the truck and asked him to come home."

The front door opened as we approached the house and a good-looking hunk in uniform came out to greet us.

"What's so important that I had to come...?" Joel stopped talking when he saw me.

"Joel, this is my sister, Bridget. Let's go inside and talk."

Nathan convinced me to file a police report. Afterwards he drove me to the ER and had a doctor check me out.

That evening I read a short piece in the local paper's police blotter section and saw that Keith had been taken into custody. The only thing I felt was relief.

I tried to keep Mom and Dad from knowing but Nathan insisted I call and let them know.

"They have to know, Bridget. They'll be hurt, and they need to be aware of the danger Keith poses should he get out of jail."

Mom and Dad had been trying to call me, but I didn't have a cell phone and couldn't be reached on the landline.

"We're so relieved to know you're okay, honey, and that Nathan's with you. I don't think Keith will try anything with him and Joel around."

"Just watch out for yourself and Dad, Mama. That jerk threatened to hurt you."

"We're not worried, honey. I

don't like guns, but we feel safer having them."

Joel invited Nathan and me to become his roommates and I was only too happy to accept. I didn't have any money for rent and didn't want Nathan paying for both of us. Joel solved my dilemma.

"As far as I'm concerned you can stay here for free, Bridget. You're already doing our laundry, plus the cooking and cleaning. That saves us a lot of time and your cooking is wonderful. Having said that, Nate says I need to tell you about a job opening down at work."

With Joel putting a good word in for me and my passing a test I was able to get on as a police dispatcher. I liked knowing that maybe I could help other women like me.

I found out I could file for a divorce myself. It took some research and Joel had a friend who explained some things. I felt so proud the day I walked out of that courtroom a free woman for the first time in three years.

Keith got some jail time, but I lost track of him after that. Joel and I soon became good friends. One night he drove me to the pizza place for dinner.

"I wish Nate would hurry up. I'm starved."

"Let's order then because I didn't invite your brother."

"Is this a date?"

"Yep. Sort of." It tickled me to see a guy like Joel blush.

Joel took things slow. He knew I still needed time to heal. It's not easy getting over something like I'd gone through with Keith. It was fun having a pizza night out, talking over cups of hot coffee, watching old movies together and just hanging out. After Keith, Joel's sensitivity surprised me. I learned later that he'd had an abusive girlfriend. Both of us were more than a little shy about relationships.

Two years whizzed by and then Nathan decided to get his own place and invited me to move in with him. I knew I couldn't stay at Joel's without a commitment, so I went with Nate. I liked our new digs, but missed seeing Joel every day. Things at work got busy and

Love Specialist Psychic SAVANNAH
Reunites Lovers and families stop Divorce

Amazes even the most skeptical critics
Don't tell me - I'll tell you everything

Call now **210-372-5447**

Sheana Powerful psychic ESP

*Amazing accuracy and predictions
Immediate Results in Reuniting
Lovers and families*

Lovers
Marriage
Etc

*Specialist in all matters of life
Amazing Results Guaranteed*
Call **210-257-9228**

for some reason Joel quit asking me for pizza or coffee. I wondered what was up with that. Had he found someone else? I asked Nate, but he didn't know.

I confronted Joel in the parking lot after work one afternoon.

"Hey, Joel. How are you? I haven't seen much of you lately."

"Hi, Bridget. I'm fine. How about yourself?"

I fidgeted a moment. "I miss you, Joel. Did I say or do something wrong?"

"When you moved out with Nathan...well I thought you might not want to see me anymore."

"Did you think I'd stay there with you without some sort of commitment? That's not how I am, Joel."

"Care to go get some dinner?"

A few months later I sat on the couch after dinner with my fairy tale book. I finished reading a story in it and sighed.

"What is it, honey?" My new husband Joel asked.

"I'm back to believing in fairy tales."

"Me too, Bridget."

Our Summer Staycation

(Continued from page 23)

"It's been wonderful," I said. "Thanks for thinking of this, Ricky."

"No problem," he said, and kissed my lips softly.

The next day, Ricky told me to wear a pair of sturdy shoes, and we took off for the mountains. We hiked, photographing a herd of deer and some friendly chipmunks, laughing at their antics. I'd forgotten that so much beauty was right on our doorstep. We stopped in a little mountain town and browsed through an antique store, then had hamburgers for lunch. The sun sparkled on the surface of the lake as we licked ice cream cones for dessert.

"I love hanging out with you," Ricky said, dabbing some ice-cream from my chin. "They say some clouds are moving in so I hope you won't mind staying home too much tomorrow."

"We can still have fun," I said. "Maybe we could watch a few movies and cook a nice meal."

The next day, just as the forecast had predicted the morning sky was gray with clouds, with no sign of the sunshine that had lit up the previous few weeks. Ricky and I set off for the large hardware store in town. When we'd moved into our house shortly after our wedding, we'd told ourselves that one of the first things we'd do was redecorate—especially our bedroom, which was painted pink. But somehow we'd never managed to find the time. Our bedroom was still a grubby pink, with a few pictures and posters from my old apartment pinned up.

That day we purchased semi-gloss paint in ivory and a mossy shade of green, as well as a drop sheet and paint brushes. I couldn't believe we were finally doing this! Ricky found a radio station that played oldies and blasted it, we changed into old clothes and for the next several hours we worked hard, shoving our bed aside and moving the rest of our furniture and stuff, cleaning the walls, and finally getting to the fun part. The walls looked proud and new again as we painted,

the ivory pale and gleaming, the green behind our bed warm and rich.

"I can't believe this is the same room!" I said when we were finally done. "Ricky, it looks incredible in here!"

"It does, doesn't it?" he looked pleased. "Do you think we need something to hang over the bed though?"

I nodded slowly—he was right. The old kitten poster dating from my college days just wouldn't cut it anymore, but right now I was too tired and hungry to think about it. Flecks of paint were drying in my hair and my tummy rumbled.

"Let's eat out, it's too late to cook," Ricky suggested. "We'll go somewhere nice."

I nodded, then hurried through the shower, dressing in a dark silk dress while Ricky took his turn. We were about to walk out the door when his phone rang, and my heart fell when I realized who was calling.

"Hey, Adam," Ricky said. "How's everything going?"

There was a long silence. Ricky's expression grew serious as he listened, and then he shook his head. "I can't do that—this week is just for me and Penny."

Adam evidently had quite a bit to say about this, because silence fell again and Ricky frowned. "No, I can't," he repeated firmly. "It's just going to have to wait until next week."

I began to relax. So many times Adam called and that spelled the end of whatever time I'd been hoping to share with my husband. But Ricky was keeping his promise to me—this week was just for the two of us. That night he took me to the restaurant where he'd asked me to marry him. It hadn't changed at all—it still glowed with candlelight and served the same Mediterranean cuisine as romantic ballads floated from the sound system. All the feelings from that night two years ago came flooding back, and my eyes filled with tears.

"Thanks for being my wife, Penny," he said. "Thanks for putting up with me, especially since the business started. I haven't meant to ignore you—I know you haven't

been happy."

"I've missed you," I admitted. "These past few days, having you all to myself—it's meant so much to me."

"Honey, I don't want to turn into a workaholic," he said softly. "Sure, I've always wanted my own business and I know that takes hard work but you come first and you always will. Do you remember what we talked about the last time we came here?"

I nodded. "We talked about making a home together and starting a family."

He took my hand. "That's a talk I'd like to have again."

Over the next few days of our staycation Ricky and I went shopping and bought a gorgeous quilt for our bed to match the new décor. We planted a row of tomato plants in our yard and discussed future plans for a new deck and fruit trees. We attended a Cooking for Couples class and learned how to make coq au vin—chicken in red wine, followed by a classic French pear tart.

When the morning that Ricky had to return to work arrived I didn't want to let him go, but I felt a deep sense of happiness and peace that had been missing earlier in the summer. We'd found our way back to one another, I realized. I knew now that Ricky and I didn't need tropical beaches or fancy hotels—we just needed each other.

My husband checked that he had his wallet and grabbed his briefcase. I followed him to the door and he gave me a sweet, lingering kiss, then smiled into my eyes. "Next summer you choose our vacation," he said. "We can go on a cruise, or to Hawaii—wherever you want, honey."

"Okay," I said. "Just as long as we have as much fun as we did this year."

I was still smiling after Ricky left. I poured myself the last cup of coffee in the pot and was just finishing it when the mail man arrived with a package. I signed for it, then brought it indoors, with absolutely no idea what the large, flat box might contain. When I opened it, my breath caught in wonder. It was a large,

framed print of the photograph we'd seen at the art museum on the first day of our staycation—the couple walking along the winding, tree-lined path. And I knew the perfect spot for it—above our bed.

I reached for my phone to call Ricky and tell him how much I loved it, but the ring tone sounded before I could punch in his number. It was Carla.

"Hey, Penny, I've been thinking about you," she said. "How are you?"

"Pretty good actually," I replied.

"I hope you told Ricky exactly what you thought about that stupid staycation idea of his," she said.

I laughed. "You're not going to believe this, but it was amazing!"

"Seriously?"

I told Carla about the museum, and the picnic, the trip up into the mountains and decorating our bedroom, but I could tell I'd lost her. As far as my friend was concerned, summertime meant sandy beaches and luxury resorts and cruises lazing next to swimming pools—I knew she'd never understand. She'd called me to sympathize, but now I felt a little sorry for her.

We said goodbye and I eagerly called Ricky to tell him how much I loved his gift, and how much I loved him and our life together. That night we hung the picture over our bed, and I looked closely at the couple and realized they could have been Ricky and I walking along, just happy to be together.

A year has now passed since our staycation, but I'll remember last summer forever. A few things have changed—we fixed up the rest of the house and added a deck. Ricky set some boundaries at work, and although the business is still important, I never feel that's it's more important than the two of us. He promised me that this year we could take a luxury vacation if that was what I wanted, but I'm happy to stay close to home—we're expecting our first baby in a few months. Maybe someday we'll jet off to some exotic destination, but that sort of thing just doesn't matter as much to me anymore. I know what's important—and it's right here at home!

THE TRUE MAHOGANY SERIES

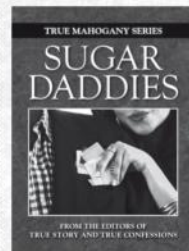
From the Editors of *True Story* and *True Confessions*
OUR PROVOCATIVE SIDE - NOW IN PRINT!

Titillating tales of temptation, obsession, romance and heartbreak, originally compiled with the African-American woman in mind, that will appeal to women of all cultures interested in an intimate and often sensual account of the female experience.



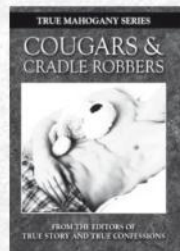
TWISTED SISTAHS
Sisters or sworn enemies? Tales of sibling rivalry at it's worst.

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H =
\$13.99 TOTAL



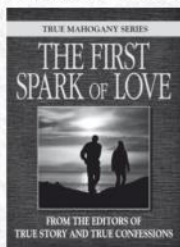
SUGAR DADDIES
Money makes the world go 'round...but can it really buy love?

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H =
\$13.99 TOTAL



COUGARS & CRADLE ROBBERS
Scandalous, sexy tales of May-December matches.

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H =
\$13.99 TOTAL



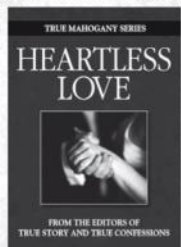
FIRST SPARK OF LOVE
Relive the first time you met your sweetheart with this romantic collection.

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H =
\$13.99 TOTAL



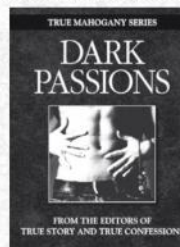
DARK YEARNINGS
A collection about hiding an unrequited love away and suffering a heartache alone.

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H =
\$13.99 TOTAL



HEARTLESS LOVE
Stories of unfaithful spouses, unrequited love and heartless cheating.

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H =
\$13.99 TOTAL



DARK PASSIONS
Steamy stories about women unable to resist the dark side of love.

\$10 + \$3.99 S&H =
\$13.99 TOTAL

ORDER SIX FOR \$60.00 and we'll pay your shipping and handling!
For US Shipping Only. Canadian orders must add \$15.00

(PLEASE PRINT)

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____ APT: _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____ PHONE #: _____

PAYMENT ENCLOSED Canadian & Foreign Customers: Please use either major credit cards or Western Union money orders in US dollars only. Please make checks and money orders payable to True Renditions, LLC. Add \$15.00 for Canadian and foreign postage.

Please place this entire form in an envelope and mail to:
TRUE RENDITIONS, LLC
105 E. 34TH STREET
SUITE 141
NEW YORK, NY 10016

CHARGE MY CREDIT CARD:

VISA MASTERCARD AMERICAN EXPRESS DISCOVER

ACCT# _____ EXPIRATION _____

SIGNATURE _____

Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery. Credit card payments for your books will appear on your statement as True Renditions LLC, not as the book name. All previous book offers from former publisher(s) are null and void.

Resisting Temptation

(Continued from page 11)

Feeling very disappointed, I had to cancel the day with Steven.

"Maybe I'll catch you another time. You still have my number too. See ya, beautiful." With a wave, he walked away.

Here I went again, calling Steven every couple of days, looking for a relationship. I caught him a couple of times, but briefly. It was still exciting to hear his voice and picture his smile. I still fantasized about him.

By the end of Leland's second truck run, I took off my wedding ring convinced that we had made a huge mistake. I didn't know what the future held, but it didn't include Leland. He had called me only once to tell me that he would be gone an extra day. He sounded more distant than ever.

Leland was home rummaging through our desk papers when Brock and I came home from the daycare.

"Have you seen my original school application papers? They're looking to promote me already, move me up to management."

I had to think a minute and then I remembered. My book lay on the desk unread for weeks. I had been too distracted with Brock, work, and of course, Steven.

"They're in that book," I said pointing.

He flipped open the cover and grabbed his papers. He did a double take and traced the writing on the inside flap. "Steven gave you his number?" His blue eyes narrowed. "Have you been seeing him?"

I hadn't done anything wrong. We'd only talked on the phone and at the park. I gave him one hug. Then I felt the empty space on my ring finger. "We chatted at the park a few times. He gave me his number in case I needed anything while you were gone. Nothing else." Of course, I wasn't going to mention all the fantasies I'd had about Steven and I kept my left hand behind my back.

Leland sighed. His shoulders slumped. "Belle, sit down. We need to talk."

I quickly put in a Disney DVD for Brock to watch. I silently followed Leland into the kitchen and sat at the table, my left hand in my lap.

"Belle, I've done the same thing to you," he began. "On the past two runs, I met up with an old girlfriend who now works for one of my customers. I didn't plan it, but I found myself forgetting about you and Brock and reliving old feelings. We went to dinner a couple of times; that's it, but I found myself wanting more."

I sat stunned, unable to believe what I was hearing. I glanced at his hands resting on the table. His left ring finger was bare too.

"If we're both willing to be attracted to other people, maybe we need to go to a marriage counselor." He reached out and softly touched my right hand, waiting for my reaction.

Did I want to salvage my marriage? Could I learn to love Leland as he deserved? Could he love me because of me and not because of a pregnancy? Did I really love Steven? Was I willing to throw away my marriage for just a possible fling? Steven hadn't offered me anything other than friendship.

My mind flashed back to those first few months together with Leland. How charming and desirable he had been. Both of us full of hope for the future with college and careers. The many hours we talked showed signs we'd make a great couple.

But the forced marriage had put a heavy strain on us both, requiring us to grow up all too fast. Now we found ourselves being attracted to others. Could we stop this destructive behavior before it got out of hand? Could we learn to communicate again? I thought about how my parents treated each other, the communication, the talking, really talking and listening to each other. Deep in my heart, I knew I owed it to myself, my son, and Leland to try counseling.

I placed my other hand on his, looking into his hopeful eyes. "Yes. I think that's a great idea, but one thing first. We need to start talking. Really talking. Both of us, Leland. I have to be able to tell you how I feel

and then you have to do the same. And we have to listen to each other."

Leland's eyes grew fearful. "I don't know how, Belle. You know my dad left me and my mom when I was two. I've never had a good role model." He swallowed hard. "I'm willing to do whatever it takes."

I paused. "And one more thing." I walked over to the desk, snatched the book and threw it into the trash. I grabbed my cell phone and deleted Steven's contact information and deleted the phone trails.

Leland retrieved a slip of paper from his pocket, ripped it up and threw it away. He pulled out his cell and wiped out her number and phone trail as well.

We both leaned back and let out a huge sigh of relief.

"I love you, Belle."

"I love you, too, Leland."

We grinned at each other like silly teenagers.

Leland stood and pulled out his wedding ring from his pocket and held it out. "Will you put this back on my finger?"

I held up my index finger and ran to the bedroom. Pulling out my jewelry box, I found my wedding ring and came back to stand before him. "Will you put mine back on me?"

Standing before each other with tears brimming in our eyes, Leland placed my ring on my finger, whispering, "With this ring, I thee wed."

As I placed Leland's ring on his finger, I repeated, "With this ring, I thee wed."

We conceived two more children over the next six years. I finished college becoming a nurse practitioner while Leland soon bought his own trucking line so he could be home with his family. Working together and communicating, we rediscovered each other. The only fantasies I now have are only of Leland. We hit a couple bumpy spots from time to time like all couples, but we talked it through, making our marriage stronger.

Through counseling, communicating and a renewed commitment without a shotgun, we both built a marriage that withstood temptation. ■

SUBSCRIBE TODAY!

MARCH MAGIC Springing into New Life **FREE SHIPPING ON BOOKS**

TRUE STORY

LEPRECHAUN LASS
Mistaken Irish Identity

UNEXPECTED LUCK
Wishes Can Come True

PHONY ST. PATRICK'S DAY
Plastic Paddies

HE'S MY CHARMER
It's No Coincidence

MARCH 2017 \$4.99 K44290 0 09128 44290 7

Springtime Storm Torn Apart by March Winds **FREE SHIPPING ON BOOKS OFFER INSIDE**

True Confessions

Spring Job Fair
A New Take on Life

Fresh Start
Learning to Cherish Life's Moments

Walk Through the Park
Blossoming into New Romance

March's Magical Luck
On the Wheels of Love

MARCH 2017 \$4.99 K44292 0 09128 44292 1

6 ISSUES \$24.00 12 ISSUES \$38.94

6 ISSUES \$24.00 12 ISSUES \$38.94

GIVE US A FRESH START! Thanks to your continued interest and support, subscriptions to *True Story* and *True Confessions* are now available from the magazines' new owners.

(PLEASE PRINT)

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____ APT: _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____ PHONE NUMBER: _____

PAYMENT ENCLOSED Canadian & Foreign Customers: Please use either major credit cards or Western Union money orders in US dollars only. Please make checks and money orders payable to True Renditions, LLC. Add \$10.00 for Canadian postage.

CHARGE MY CREDIT CARD:

VISA MASTERCARD AMERICAN EXPRESS DISCOVER

ACCT# _____ EXPIRATION _____

SIGNATURE _____

PLACE ENTIRE FORM IN AN ENVELOPE AND MAIL TO:
TRUE RENDITIONS, LLC
105 E. 34TH STREET
SUITE 141
NEW YORK, NY 10016

Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery of first issue. Credit card payments for your subscription will appear on your statement as True Renditions LLC, not as the magazine name. All previous subscriptions purchased from former publisher(s) are null and void.

NEW YEAR—NEW BEGINNINGS My Fresh Family

WIN FREE BOOKS (See Page 23)

TRUE STORY

THE BEST GIFT OF ALL
Christmas Riches

SNOWMEN IN THE MORNING
Gifts Left Behind

TAKING DOWN THE LIGHTS
An Unexpected End to the Holidays

MY LOVE RESOLUTION
Please Take Me Back



READ THE TRUES ON ALL YOUR DEVICES!

UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Busting my Fairytale Wedding

"Mom, Alfonso and I are finally getting married!" I jumped up and down at the bus stop, making a spectacle of myself with my cell phone at my ear. "I feel like Cinderella!" "Congratulations," Mom said, sounding happy for me but subdued. "When are you going to tie the knot?" "He's coming home in June. Isn't that perfect?" "Umm... why is it perfect?" Mom sounded distracted. "Because it's June!" I squealed. "The month of weddings! Oh, gosh, just think of it—I can finally have my Cinderella wedding!"



Read TRUE STORY and TRUE CONFESSIONS on your iPhone, Android, Kindle Fire, iPad, Mac and PC!

Subscribe and have the latest issues emailed to you every month, or purchase individual issues from 2009 to the present!

**JUST SEARCH FOR US ON www.ZINIO.com
THE WORLD'S LARGEST DIGITAL NEWSTAND**

Father Doesn't Know Best

(Continued from page 31)

from each other, probably to avoid the subject of Brenda. I didn't like being out of Dad's life, but the less I knew about his and Brenda's relationship, the better.

One afternoon, Dad called me into his office. My hopes that he and Brenda had parted company were dashed when he passed on an invitation from Brenda. "She'd like you and Clark to join us and her two daughters for brunch at her house this coming Sunday. She wants to get to know you better. And we'd all like to meet Clark," he added.

I knew Dad was offering me a chance to make things easier for both sides, so I agreed. Clark, who'd done his share of trying to convince me that Dad should be on his own when it came to dealing with female companions, said he'd enjoy meeting the family. I nearly choked at his using the word "family," but let it go.

Clark looked especially handsome that Sunday when we went to Brenda's. He always looked good to me, but he looked extra nice that day. I'll admit to having taken some extra time getting ready too—wearing a little more makeup than usual and a pastel floral skirt with a pink shell top, I felt my mood matching the sunny day. Maybe this get-together was what I needed to open my mind to Dad's moving on with his life.

Dad opened Brenda's door when we arrived, heartily shaking Clark's hand and greeting him like a longtime friend. Two blonde females around my age jumped in to embrace both Clark and me, introducing themselves as Shanna and Lila, their names matching both their Barbie doll like looks and their form-fitting sheaths, so tight on their voluptuous shapes I wondered how they could breathe. Brenda called us into the living room which looked like an ad in a home magazine. She gave Clark and me air kisses and handed us a glass of champagne. The first thing that came to mind was "expensive tastes," but I tried to squelch the thought and be more open minded, for Dad's sake. And to be honest, for my sake too. I

didn't like the minor estrangement between my father and me.

Shanna and Lila, I didn't know which was which, turned their charms onto Clark, laughing at his quips and seeming impressed by his owning his own business. Dad and Brenda keyed on Clark too, giving him the third degree about the future of his job and how he found clients. I was relieved to watch the show—my feelings of being on the outside growing. And jealousy too—Clark obviously liked the attention he was getting from Brenda's daughters.

Brenda finally ushered us into the kitchen where a buffet brunch sat in chafing dishes on the granite counter. Everyone oohed and aahed at the scrumptious choices: scrambled eggs, sausage, bacon, fruit salad, hash brown potatoes, cinnamon rolls, Belgium waffles and two or three different juices. Even I was impressed. "Did the three of you do all the work yourselves?" I asked, scooping a spoonful of salad onto my delicate china plate.

One of the girls laughed. "Right," she said as if I'd made a joke. "Mom has a list of caterers on her speed dial, right Mom?"

Brenda smiled. "Caterers and take-out. I'm too busy during the day to do much cooking or meal planning."

"Where do you work?" I asked, interested in what she did to allow for such an upscale lifestyle.

She giggled. "Oh, I don't work, dear. I keep busy at the gym and playing tennis. Those sorts of things eat up my time regularly."

"And don't forget shopping," Shanna or Lila added. The three of them laughed while Dad, Clark and I took our meals to the large polished table in the formal dining room.

Thankfully the meal went quickly, mainly with the girls fawning over Clark, and Brenda talking Dad into accompanying them to a car dealership later to look at a new model that Lila, or was it Shanna, was interested in. My face turned to stone each time the girls talked to Dad, calling him "Daddy Tucker." So possessive, so familiar. Dad said Brenda had been divorced twice so they had a father of their own somewhere. I felt like crying or screaming, but kept my

quaking emotions under control.

I was totally relieved to say goodbye to Brenda and the girls, enduring their hugs and more air kisses, with a promise to get together again soon. When we reached Clark's truck, I was surprised when he turned to me and blew out a sigh of relief and said, "I'm glad that's over."

"What?" I thought he'd enjoyed every minute of the visit.

He drove down the street. "That's one group of very high maintenance women. Every one of them reminded me of my ex. No wonder you're a bit suspicious about Brenda. She's pretty materialistic."

I was so relieved to hear him finally on my side of the equation. For weeks, he'd been trying to convince me to keep an open mind and for Dad's sake, get to know Brenda better. Today had opened my eyes to what I already knew: I didn't like my dad's interest in her.

I shook my head. "He and Mom had been married for nearly thirty years, Clark. He's easy prey for scheming women."

"He's an intelligent guy. But to be fair, your father's an adult and knows what's what in the world. He'll figure it out."

"I could tell he approved of you," I remarked.

He smiled. "That's good because I'm really into his daughter." That made my pulse jump. For the first time all day, I felt good and knew how lucky I was to have Clark in my life.

My time with Dad improved somewhat over the next few weeks, but then he became quiet and didn't keep in touch much either in or out of work. When I paid his credit card bills, I noticed charges for jewelry stores and expensive restaurants and knew he was spending a lot of money on Brenda. I closed my eyes to the bills and told myself he could do what he wanted, it was his life. But part of me wanted to scold him and wake him up.

After I paid his especially large bill for a weekend stay at an out of town resort, I decided to talk some sense into my father by inviting him out for lunch on Father's Day. Unless Brenda and the girls had other plans

for “Daddy Tucker,” I was sure he’d take me up on my offer of getting together. I was right and met him at a nice family restaurant that we used to go to often on Father’s Day Sunday.

Dad looked good in a new golf shirt and khaki pants. “I’m playing a round of golf this afternoon,” he said once we’d ordered. “Haven’t played in a while.”

“You’ve been busy,” I said, hoping I’d opened the door to the subject of Brenda keeping him occupied for the last several weeks.

He slipped his napkin onto his lap and turned serious. “Other than the fact that I’m dating someone, what specifically do you have against Brenda?”

I perked up and dove in. “I think she’s a gold-digger, Dad. I know you’re still an attractive man, for your age,” I added with a slight grin, “and with your status and owning your own business, you’re a catch. She was too eager to hook you and keep up her luxurious lifestyle.” I sat back and let my statement sink in.

“I’ll admit to my ego being an easy mark for a good-looking woman,” he confessed, then gave me an embarrassed look. “You’ll be happy to know Brenda and are no longer keeping company.” I gasped and for clarity, he added, “I broke it off with her several days ago.”

“Wow,” was all I could think of to say.

“Brenda’s been after me for weeks to move in together, preferably at my house. Her ultimate plan was for both of us to sell our homes and buy a place on the golf course.”

“Those houses are top of the line and so expensive.”

“Don’t I know that,” he said, rubbing his face. “A while back I ran into one of Brenda’s ex-husbands at a businessman’s meeting. He was eager to warn me away from her, letting me know how she’s gone through all the money she’d received from their divorce. By the time she’d latched onto him, she’d also run through the previous ex-husband’s money as well. After our trip to the car dealership with Brenda and the girls, Shanna asked me to co-sign for a car loan on a luxury model she’d

had her eye on. That opened my eyes a bit and I did some discrete sleuthing about Brenda’s finances. I discovered her house has a second mortgage on it and she’s in debt up to her eyeballs.” He rubbed a hand over his face. “When I realized I wasn’t willing to deal with those kinds of issues at my stage of life, I also came to the conclusion that I was more infatuated with Brenda than in love with her. And I started questioning her sincerity and motives. I told her we needed a break and she seemed to understand.”

I wanted to cheer but I remained calm. “A break is good, Dad.”

He huffed a breath. “Seems like Brenda has already found solace. A few days ago, I saw her being escorted out of a restaurant by Malcom Styles.”

“Malcom Styles! He’s at least eighty and in poor health.” My eyes narrowed. “But he’s very wealthy.”

“She once mentioned how against prenuptial agreements she was. I’m sure old Malcom is happy to have a trophy on his arm these days and doesn’t care about such things as legalities.”

“I honestly can’t say I’m sorry things worked out this way for you, Dad.”

He smiled, a genuine one this time. “I’m not sorry either, Dora. It’s all for the best, believe me. And I’ve learned a lesson from this experience.” He raised his ice tea glass. “I hereby declare romantic entanglements on the part of either father or daughter to be open and honest. We’re allowed to give a simple opinion at the onset of said relationships, but to allow nature to take place naturally with an occasional opinion now and then. Let’s trust each other’s instincts. We’ll put Brenda in the same category as Tripp. You learned a valuable lesson from his being less than truthful and I learned all I needed to know about Brenda’s self-indulgence and lack of financial judgement before it caused me problems. Let’s hope any future woman in my life is as good a choice as your Clark is.”

I raised my glass and clinked his, glad to have Dad back on track. “Here’s to a happy Father’s Day and only good life lessons from now on.”

Join Forces in June

(Continued from page 27)

We grew to love that little girl so much. I would take care of her half the time and Perry and Serena the other half. Perry and I would sometimes meet up with Gayle for activities that we used to do when our boys were babies. We’d strap Gayle in the old stroller that Perry had dug out of the attic and cleaned up to take her for long walks in the same park we had enjoyed in “the good ol’ days.”

Perry once confided in me during one of these walks that he and Serena were having marriage troubles. She never wanted to be a mother and especially not at this age. I felt sorry for her, knowing that she didn’t sign up for any of this. None of us had. But I felt sorrier for Perry who was just trying to be the best sudden grandfather he could. We never know what life is going to throw at us and he was a good man, deserving of support from his spouse. Since he didn’t seem to be getting much backing in that regard, I did my best to be extra supportive and caring towards him when we saw each other. In time, the old wounds from our divorce and the hurt that led up to it began to close and I felt a friendship forming between us.

We breathed a collective sigh of relief at Gayle’s appointment when the doctor told us that so far, there were no signs of mother-to-baby passed drug effects.

Of course, she wasn’t out of the clear yet. Tests would need to be conducted as Gayle grew to see if any drug exposure had caused cognitive performance or information-processing deficits in her brain. Still, we were thrilled with the good news so far and so, so happy for Gayle and her future.

Perry and I felt confident that we could co-parent Gayle and even though we weren’t sure what would happen when Barrett and Tessa were released, we knew that no sensible judge would send a baby back to such unfit parents.

But unbelievably, they regained custody almost as soon as they

were released. Perry and I vowed to the courts that we would fight for her, no matter what it took.

Within a year, Serena left Perry because she claimed the constant court battles for Gayle consumed him. I also think that she was jealous because he and I had been spending so much time together, for Gayle's sake. I felt a pang of regret because I just wanted to see Perry happy.

"It wasn't just that," Perry told me at lunch one day after I told him how sorry I was about his divorce. We often got together for lunch to discuss Gayle. "We've been growing apart for years."

"Still, I'm sorry, Perry," I had told him while he had shrugged and taken another bite of his salad.

Not soon after Perry's divorce, we learned from Barrett's social worker that Tessa had overdosed in a seedy motel.

I cried. "Was Gayle there?" I asked frantically. "Did she see any of it?"

She was then two years old and Perry and I had gotten temporary custody of her whenever Barrett and Tessa were arrested or had CPS show up. But Gayle was always ripped away from us to be reunited with them.

"I don't have the details," the social worker told us.

We fought harder than ever, teaming up to get petitions signed and hosted fundraisers for the best lawyers to fight for Gayle's release from Barrett. We spent countless nights researching child protection laws and state codes. But over and over again, just when we thought we would win custody of our granddaughter, the courts allowed her to say with our drug-addicted son.

Perry and I never lost sight of the true victim who was caught up in the horrible mess: sweet little Gayle, who was a sensitive and darling child. I thought my heart had gone through all it could take, with Barrett's addiction and my divorce from Perry but seeing Gayle cry when they came to take her back to Barrett was a whole new level of pain. I knew that Perry was right; we had to do whatever it took to get Gayle.

The doorbell rang, pulling me out of the bittersweet memories that had consumed my life.

"Hi Meryl." Perry stood on the front porch, looking weary and a bit worse for the wear but still handsome. In his hands, he held a canister of the gourmet coffee that I loved so much and a half-gallon of pea milk. "Fuel," he said. "I had a feeling that we're going to need it."

I smiled at my former husband, my friend, my new partner in the biggest fight of our lives.

As he fired up his laptop, I stirred pea milk into steaming mugs of coffee and brought them over to the kitchen table next to a plate of almond cookies.

"Hey," Perry said, taking the mug I set by him. "This old thing."

I looked at the big blue and white mug and laughed.

"Oh yeah," I said, looking down at my own large red and white mug. We had picked them out from a souvenir shop on our honeymoon in Mazatlán. "They're still the biggest ones in the cupboard."

He smiled at me fondly before turning back to his computer.

A few hours and a whole lot of coffee and cookies later, we had checked into the laws and retained the services of a reputable private investigator to check in on Barrett and Gayle. This investigator had experience in similar custody situations.

"So now it's just hurry up and wait, right?" I asked, pushing the cookie plate away.

Perry nodded. "That's pretty much it," he said. "I was also reading that it would greatly help to have one dedicated home for Gayle ready to go. We both have rooms for her in our homes but we should consolidate her things into one room."

"That makes sense," I said. "What do you have in mind? We can use her room here since it's plenty big and she has her own bathroom."

"I think that's best," he said. "This is a great home for children."

We stood in silence for a few moments, looking around and feeling the memories swirl around us. I

HOTtoHave.com • Ad Rates: 800-825-2461

**ALWAYS FREE! LADIES TALK TO HOT LOCAL GUYS
SECRETENCOUNTERS.COM Or 1-800-252-1990**

Try the psychics I trust!

Jim Spelling Satisfaction Guaranteed

66¢ per min*

PSYCHIC SOURCE®
Life's possibilities. Revealed.

1.800.220.1254
Mention Promo Code: ROMANCE

New members only.
For Entertainment Only. 18+ psychicsource.com/STORI

wiped a tear away and was surprised to feel the weight of Perry's arms as he pulled me into a deep hug.

I exhaled the biggest breath I didn't know I had been holding and looked up at him.

"It'll all be okay, Meryl," he said. "This time it will be, I promise."

He didn't disappoint. We presented the court with photos that hurt to look at. The investigator had plenty of shots of Gayle wearing no shoes or socks standing on the ground of a filthy motel parking lot, wearing clothes that didn't fit and looking a few days shy of a bath. He had statements from various people from the motel owner to "acquaintances" of Barrett that were willing to testify in court that he was an unfit parent.

It wasn't fast and it wasn't easy but in the end, Perry and I gained permanent custody of Gayle. When we picked her up, all three of us hugged and cried for what seemed like hours. We took her home to get her bathed and into new, clean clothes before taking her out to lunch to celebrate.

"I never want to be away from Nana and Gramps ever again!" she said.

"Never," Perry and I said at the same time. We looked at each other and smiled. It was a promise that both of us were happy to make.

Later that same day, I asked Perry to move out of his condo and back in the home that was too big for just Gayle and I and he graciously accepted.

Perry, Gayle and I fell into a lovely 61

routine that brought the love back into my heart and I began to really live again and enjoy life. Perry, who slept in the guest room, and I were amazing teammates together. Occasionally our older son would visit our modge-podge new family and Gayle loved to get spoiled by her Uncle Maxon and the presents he would bring her from New York City where he works as an investment banker.

Then came the day when we decided to enjoy a simple picnic in the park. Perry had packed a basket for us. It was a gorgeous June afternoon—one year to the day that Perry and I went to battle with the private investigator to get Gayle back.

“Gayle, get the cake for Nana, will you?” he asked.

Gayle looked at him with a huge gap-toothed grin.

“Cake?” I asked. “I didn’t know this would turn into such a fancy picnic.”

Little Gayle with Perry’s help, lifted out a small white pastry box. Through the clear window, I saw a heart-shaped cake with words written in frosting.

I opened the top of the cake box to make sure the words said what I thought—and hoped they did.

NANA, WILL YOU MARRY GRAMPS AGAIN?

I stared at those frosted words until I thought I could speak without crying.

I looked over to see that Perry was on bended knee on the picnic blanket in front of me. Gayle was practically jumping up and down behind him.

“What do you say to a second time around, Meryl?” Perry asked, holding out his grandmother’s antique ring that I gave back after the divorce.

Now Perry and I are re-married, loving life the second time around, with our beloved Gayle, world’s best flower girl. We still hold out hope that Barrett will get sober one day and come back to us but for now, the best gift we can give him is to raise Gayle the way that she deserves to be raised. ■

Rekindled Romance

(Continued from page 35)

“I just found out this week where he was. I’ve been worried sick about him.”

She looked angry and worried at the same time. Apparently, he hadn’t told her what he was doing, and I wondered how she found out where he was. Her tone of voice made me think there might be something wrong with Andy we hadn’t noticed yet. Nuisance? Did she consider him a nuisance?

“Not at all,” I said quickly. “It’s been fascinating to see him and Mom reconnect with each other. Your Dad is a very special person.” I was surprised at myself for rising so swiftly to his defense.

“Yes, he certainly is,” she snapped, “and I don’t want to see him dragged back into the past. You have no idea how hard it was for him to lose the ability to play football, and anything from that time of his life reminds him of it.

“Mother had tried her best to turn him to another career field when they first married. but he wouldn’t listen. He could have been a top-notch attorney or stock broker on Wall Street that would have paid a lot more money without bringing all the painful memories, but all he could think of was football. He doesn’t need any more reminders, and I’ve learned your Mom is a big reminder. Mother and I have spent years helping him cope. Now that she’s gone, it’s up to me to care for him and see that he doesn’t return to that painful time when he was so depressed.”

I stared at her not knowing what to say. What she said reminded me of a school friend of mine who had suffered severe back injuries in a car accident when she was a toddler. She would always have trouble walking, and her mother smothered her with protection and pity. As a result, she never learned how to compensate for her disability and live a productive life. It made me wonder what kind of relationship Andy had with his family.

The right words finally came. “Why don’t you come to supper with

us tonight and see for yourself. Andy and Mom will be here, and I think you might be surprised to see how she affects him. Supper’s at six.”

She hesitated, then said frostily, “All right. We’ll see what’s best for him.” She turned and walked out without another word.

I wished I had time before tonight to find out how Andy felt about his life and family. I had a feeling it wouldn’t be the same as what Glenda described. I couldn’t believe what she seemed to imply about him, and I couldn’t stop new questions flooding my mind. Did he have a serious clinical depression? Was he ever hospitalized because of it? Did he have spells when he went off the rails? I would certainly not want Mom to have to deal with that. To be fair, should I tell Andy that his daughter is coming?

There was not time for answers or to change the menu for dinner. All I did was put a small arrangement of flowers and another place setting on the table. I would have to wing it and hope for the best. I had told Mom she was coming, and I called Andy and told him.

Mom greeted her warmly when she arrived a few minutes early.

“I’m so happy to meet you,” Mom said shaking her hand. “Andy has not told me much about his family except that they were always there for him. I’ve been hoping I’d soon have the chance to get to know you.”

“Yes, well, I came a little early to let you know some things about Father he probably hasn’t told you,” she said curtly. “He requires a lot of care and attention.”

Mom’s eyebrows went up. “Really? It seems to me he’s doing remarkably well. His leg hardly bothers him at all.”

Glenda nodded. “That’s what he likes to pretend. He has a rigorous routine he has to follow to keep the improvement he’s gained.”

I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. It’s been what—thirty years or so since his injury. Surely his bones would have completely healed by now. What is she trying to do?

Mom smiled and said smoothly, “Why don’t we wait until he comes to talk about this. Tell us about your-

self. Do you have a family?"

She gave us a cold look. "My mother and father were my family. Mom always made it clear that Dad was most important. He needed us, and we had an obligation to help and protect him. She didn't encourage me to have friends, especially boyfriends. She needed me to help her."

A chill ran down my spine. What kind of person was the woman he'd been married to? If he was so dependent on her and his daughter, why did he contact Mom when he learned Dad had died? More questions I couldn't answer. I could only hope that when he got here all would become clear.

Seeing that there was no use trying to get information from her, I busied myself making coffee and fixing a plate of the shortbread cookies Mom made this morning. Glenda accepted the coffee, refused the cookies, and we all sat making uneasy small talk waiting for Andy. When he didn't appear in thirty minutes, Glenda stood up and announced, "I'm not going to wait any longer. He might have had one of his spells. For his sake, let me know when he's here and I'll come back," she said stiffly. She laid a business card down next to her coffee cup and left.

Spells? He has spells?

I could tell from the look on Mom's face, she felt the same relief and apprehension I did, glad she was gone, but worried about Andy. What had happened to keep him from coming? Was he all right? Before we could get too worked up, he was there, full of apologies and embarrassment.

"I'm so sorry I'm late," he said breathlessly when Mom opened the door. "There was a big accident on the highway, and traffic was stopped in all directions. I guess Glenda has left already."

The look on Mom's face when she gave him a hug plainly showed that the things his daughter said about him didn't change her feelings for him. "She left a few minutes ago. I was so worried about you."

"Sorry I couldn't call. My phone was out of power. The last thing it did was deliver Minnie's message.

What did Glenda tell you?"

When Mom looked at him uncertainly, he said quickly, "Let me guess. 'If it hadn't been for her and my mother I wouldn't be here today. I mustn't do or think of anything related to football or I might have some kind of mental and emotional fit. I have to stay on a very strict regime or I would relapse into a helpless blob.' Does that about cover it?"

I couldn't stop a grin from sneaking out. He understood exactly what had happened. It was pretty much what she'd said, and except for the fact that his wife and daughter's care did have a part in his survival, I could believe it was all nonsense. What he said next confirmed it.

"It's time you heard the whole story. Yes, my wife was there for me. She saw me through all the pain and treatments and emotional turmoil of those first two years. The trouble is she didn't stop when I got better. She enjoyed the 'nurse in charge' role and she couldn't seem to believe that I was actually healing physically and mentally. She fussed and hovered over everything I did, especially when I decided, against her advice, to become a coach. She doubled down on the exercises and meds and never let me forget I had a disability. It was only on the football field with my teams that I felt like a whole man."

He paused for a deep breath and then continued. "When she became pregnant, she was so shocked I thought she was going to have a seizure. 'I don't have time for a baby,' she kept saying. That was when my gut feeling told me there was something not quite right about her, but with a baby, my child, on the way, there was nothing I could do but try to see that she did nothing drastic."

He paused and I waited silently. "Oddly enough, the baby helped restore her balance somewhat. Glenda arrived in due time and, for a little while, caring for her took my wife's mind off me. But by the time Glenda was three I noticed my wife had her helping look after me. 'We have to take care of poor Daddy because he's been hurt,' was her

most frequent remark to our daughter. For several years, Glenda thought my name was Poor Daddy. They smothered me with care and what they thought was love. More than once I seriously considered divorce, but every time I saw Glenda's smile I couldn't bring myself to leave her alone with my wife. I finally accepted the situation and just stayed out of their way as much as I could, spending more time at work and less at home.

"When my wife died three years ago with an unexpected aneurism, I admit I felt both relief and sorrow. But I wasn't entirely free. Glenda had learned her mother's lessons well, and she took over my 'care'."

He stopped, then said sadly, "I was hoping you'd never have to know all that."

Mom sighed deeply and reached over and took his hand. "The Andy I know doesn't need any full-time care. He is a courageous fighter who has overcome a dreadful injury to both his body and soul. It is I who needs help to cope with my world. I am not the kind who likes to live alone. Minnie is precious and important to me, but she has her own family to care for. Thank you for telling me." She paused then said gently, "Do you think we can forgive and forget the past? Glenda needs your help, too. She's a lovely woman who needs a future of her own. With you safely taken care of and with encouragement from both of us, she can do it, and we have a second chance to enjoy the rest of our life together. Let's not waste it."

Andy looked at her with such love and gratitude in his eyes I almost missed the gleam of tears on his cheek.

"I somehow knew when I saw your husband's obituary that it was the right thing to do to call you. Do you think it's possible we can make up for all those lost years?" he asked.

"Of course it's possible," Mom said firmly.

They sat there gazing into each other's eyes with such intensity it seemed they'd drifted into another world. I knew in my heart I didn't have to worry about my mother with her boyfriend anymore.

My Visit From Beyond

Have you experienced a "Visit From Beyond"? Please tell us about it! Send your email to trueswriters@yahoo.com Please indicate whether you wish your full name or your initials used if your story is printed. Manuscripts cannot be returned or acknowledged. Please keep a duplicate copy for your records.

DADDY'S GIRL

A Love Like No Other

I have never loved another man like the love I have for my father. He was the best dad. He worked a 9-5 job, but he always had energy and loved to run around the neighborhood with me and my brother after work.

We'd play basketball in the cul-de-sac and baseball down the street—he was always so energetic!

Who would've known testicular cancer would claim the life of such a vigorous, loving husband and father.

Every day, I miss him, but I still have many mementos from him. On Father's Day, I make sure I take a moment, pull out his baseball mitt and hit one, "out of the park" as he'd say, just for him.

I miss you, Daddy, and I'm so happy you're in Heaven. Love, your baby girl.

—Elma G., Florida



T-Mobile®

2 LINES
\$100 /MO.
WITH AUTOPAY

UNLIMITED DATA

TAXES & FEES INCLUDED

On all T-Mobile plans, during congestion the top 3% of data users (>28GB/mo.) may notice reduced speeds until next bill cycle. Activate HD feature at no cost for HD video (US only). Activate no-cost upgrade for 10GB high-speed Mobile Hotspot/tethering; after 10GB, tethering at max 3G speeds.

CALL NOW 1-855-893-9223



Sales tax & regulatory fees included in mo. service price; call T-Mobile for details.

AN OFFICIALLY LICENSED FIRST FROM HAWTHORNE VILLAGE

LIFE OF ELVIS™

TRIBUTE COLLECTION

**NOT AVAILABLE
IN ANY STORE!**



Musical!



It Lights Up!

Shown much smaller than actual size, with Life of Elvis scenes approximately 4.25" x 3" and centerpiece display (Shipment 3) 8" x 6.5". A fine collectible, suitable for ages 14 and older.

ELVIS™ and ELVIS PRESLEY™ are trademarks of ABG EPE IP LLC
Rights of Publicity and Persona Rights: Elvis Presley Enterprises, LLC
© 2015 ABG EPE IP LLC elvis.com

Shipment One:
"Tupelo, MS" and
"Overnight Success"



THE BRADFORD EXCHANGE
HAWTHORNE VILLAGE DIVISION

9210 N. MARYLAND ST.,
NILES, IL 60714-1322

Limited Time Offer—Respond Promptly

YES! Please enter my order for the *Life of Elvis™ Tribute Collection*, beginning with "Tupelo, MS" and "Overnight Success" as described in this announcement. **SEND NO MONEY NOW**

Signature _____

Mrs. Mr. Ms. _____
Name (Please Print Clearly)

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

E-Mail _____

917955-E57601

*Plus \$9.99 shipping and service. All sales subject to acceptance and product availability. Please allow 4-6 weeks for shipment.

CERTIFICATE OF AUTHENTICITY & 365-DAY GUARANTEE

CELEBRATE THE LEGACY OF ELVIS!

The *Life of Elvis™ Tribute Collection* is a stirring way to celebrate the legacy of the one and only King of Rock 'n' Roll™—loved by millions around the world. It's a treasure to be cherished for years to come! This commemorative collection is meticulously crafted to re-create dynamic scenes from life and career of Elvis Presley™, from his childhood in Tupelo to the early recordings to his Hollywood glory and the triumph of his brilliant concerts. Each fully sculpted scene is handcrafted and hand painted for the utmost in accuracy. And each has a fitting place around the collection's illuminated and musical centerpiece that plays "Love Me Tender" and other famous Elvis hits at the touch of a switch!

Begin your collection with these memorable scenes...

Your heirloom-quality collection begins with Set One, "Tupelo, MS" and "Overnight Success" that can be yours today at the incredibly attractive price of only \$59.97*, payable in three installments of just \$19.99 each, the first billed before shipment. Subsequent shipments—including the centerpiece and other sets of two scene dioramas—will be billed separately at the same low price and shipped about every other month. You may cancel at any time and our best-in-the-business 365-day guarantee assures your satisfaction.

**Not available in any store.
ACT NOW!**

To get your *Life of Elvis™ Tribute Collection* at its remarkable low issue price, you need send no money now. Complete and mail the Reservation Application today!

www.bradfordexchange.com/LifeofElvis

© Hawthorne Village 14-01804-001-EIL