

KAREN KINGSBURY

October 2015

presents

Family Fiction

TRACIE PETERSON

The Stunning Conclusion of
her Brides of Seattle Series

ELIZABETH BYLER YOUNTS

Your new Favorite Amish Author

3 Suspenseful Amish Reads

A Look at the Autumn Brides
Novella Collection

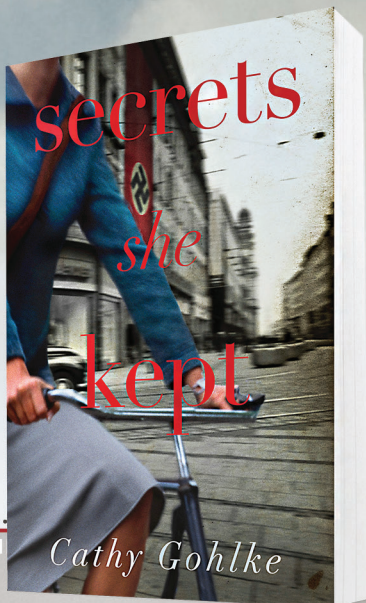
+ PLUS Interviews with
Kellie Coates Gilbert &
Stephanie Grace Whitson

GO!

SPECIAL: START READING NOW!!
2 Fabulous Excerpts in This Issue!

..... An unforgettable story of
forgiveness, love, and sacrifice
 that will stay with you long after the last page.

Secrets a mother
 could never share . . .
 consequences a
 daughter could not
 redeem. A young
 woman learns shocking
 secrets about her family's
 past during WWII and
 must decide if she can
 atone for what they did,
 and how their legacy
 will shape her future.



"Gohlke tells a gripping tale of sacrifice, loss, love, and hope against the setting of familiar historical events."

Publishers Weekly on Promise Me This

"This dramatic and heart-wrenching interpretation . . . will enthrall fans of character-driven Christian fiction and readers who enjoy Francine Rivers."

Library Journal, starred review for *Promise Me This*

"*Saving Amelie* is a moving portrayal of the fortitude and resilience of the human spirit. At times both emotional and suspenseful, this is a fantastic novel for those who love both historical fiction and human interest stories."

Romantic Times

What readers are saying about *Secrets She Kept* on Goodreads:

"Cathy Gohlke beautifully weaves together truth and heroism against a stark backdrop of the unbelievable evil of the Holocaust. Readers can expect mystery, drama, intrigue, and romance in this unforgettable story of love and sacrifice.

A Must Read!" —Carrie

"This is one of the most powerful books I have ever read! This is not a book you put down after you finish and forget about it. NO! It is a book that lingers on in your heart because it is so rich and powerful. It teaches the

reader a huge spiritual principle: the power of forgiveness.

I believe many believers struggle with this and I believe they will be able to let go of that bitterness after reading this wonderful story." —Susan

"I inhaled this story. This book is captivating, a page-turner and will challenge you. It is also a story of sweet forgiveness." —Cara



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CATHY GOHLKE is a two-time Christy Award-winning author. She and her husband divide their time between Northern Virginia and their home on the banks of the Laurel Run in Elkton, Maryland.

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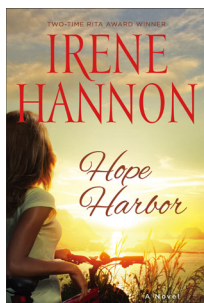
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AMISH



3 Suspenseful Amish Reads for October
Plus New Releases

HISTORICAL



Stephanie Grace Whitson
Plus New Releases

ROMANCE

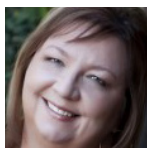


Autumn Brides
Plus New Releases

Check out a list of all new releases this month!
<http://www.familyfiction.com/books/new-releases/>

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CONTEMPORARY



Kellie Coates Gilbert
Plus New Releases

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WRITE TO US

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“The story will captivate readers who love Amish culture and enjoy spending time in the Plain community.”

—AMY CLIPSTON,
bestselling author of *A Simple Prayer*

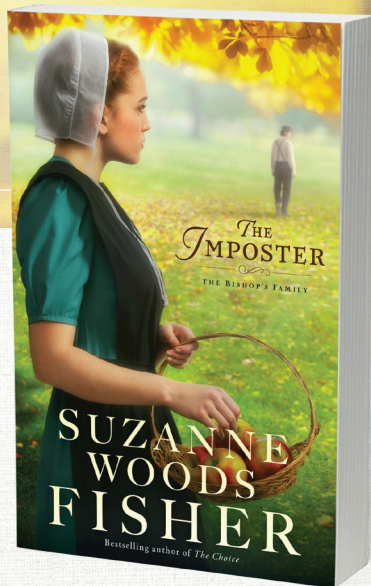
Katrina Stoltzfus needs time to heal her broken heart. What she doesn't need is attention from Andy Miller, a farm hand who always seems to say the right thing and be in the right place at the right time. Is Andy for real, or too good to be true?

“Filled with endearing characters and wry wit, *THE IMPOSTER* IS A WONDERFUL STORY.”

—KATHLEEN FULLER, bestselling author
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“With warmth and wit, Suzanne Woods Fisher introduces the Stoltzfus family saga. A VERY ENJOYABLE READ!”

—JERRY EICHER, author of the Land of Promise series



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WHO WE ARE

DEIDRA ROMERO



Deidra Romero is a twenty-something blogger and bookworm. She loves good company, good coffee and a good story.

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REL MOLLET



Rel Mollet resides in Melbourne, Australia, with her movie-loving husband and three book-loving daughters.

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FamilyFiction

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HEART OF THE STORY

—A Message from Karen Kingsbury



Chandra could hear every word and she felt uncomfortable. Something about the way Samuel Meier had talked about his strategy troubled her. “Mr. Meier, excuse me. What’s this? A strategy?”

Meier stopped cold. He clearly hadn’t intended for Chandra to hear him. “It’s nothing.”

“Something about Christians?” Chandra didn’t want to create tension, but she needed to know. She had her reasons.

“Yes ... Just that after the first few weeks, the candidates with the more outspoken faith are asked to tone it down.”

His smile grew bigger. “So we can get to know other sides of their life and personality.”

“Hmm.” She paused. “Got it.” Chandra nodded and hid the fact that her world had just tilted off its axis. Of course there was a strategy. Now it all made sense. Six years ago she had been asked by the contestant coordinator to limit her comments about God, find other ways to make a name for herself. At the time Chandra had been more than willing to cooperate. *Fifteen Minutes* was a singing show, after all. No need to preach to people. Now, though, it creeped her out to think of Meier himself making a strategy to quiet people of faith. Was there a strategy to quiet people from talking about their sports obsession or city or whatever else defined them? No, of course not. Chandra breathed deep. The sense of meaninglessness came over her again. What was the point of any of this? *Fifteen Minutes* was a machine, churning out new talent for a public whose appetite for celebrities was never satisfied. Meier wasn’t the only one with issues. If faith was so important to certain contestants, then why were they here? Shouldn’t they be leading Bible studies or taking the gospel to villages in Africa? Did they really think being on *Fifteen Minutes* would give glory to their God? Like she once thought it would?

Or was it the easiest way to justify the very human desire for fame? Chandra stared at the blue sky and tried to remember herself back then. Her motives had been sincere, right?

—Excerpt From *Fifteen Minutes*, by Karen Kingsbury

Shining Your Light.

We live in a crazy world. There is so much pressure around us to silence our faith. We are urged to be tolerant of everyone and accepting of anything. As Christians, it can feel like we are being told more and more to water down our faith so that we don't offend or upset anyone. There are dozens of articles in the news and on TV about teens in schools being asked to remove messages of faith, abstinence, and Jesus from their clothing and lifestyle. Or privately owned bakeries and cafes being told that their belief is discriminating and wrong. It's clear that the enemy is hard at work to silence Christians. Even Chandra, a successful singer and host of a popular TV show, was feeling the pressure to keep faith quiet and not sound "too preachy".

The good news is this: The darker the world, the more desperately people will crave the light.

Though we need to be loving and respectful of other people, we need to be more "preachy", not less. With so many hurting hearts in the world, facing identity crisis, and the need for affirmation, the world is desperate for truth and direction. For us, the answer is obvious; the light of Jesus needs to be brighter than ever. No matter how much the world tries to drown out the sound of Christians, God will not be mocked, and light will always overcome darkness. So let your voice be heard. In love and truth, let your faith ring out. Speak up and fill this world with the light it so desperately needs. Don't hide it when you feel pressured to be silenced. Let your light shine for all to see!

Verse for the Week:

"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

—Matthew 5:14-16



Fifteen Minutes is a story that follows the quest and cost of fame, and the certainty that sometimes there are more important things than winning.

GET FIFTEEN MINUTES HERE: <http://www.karenkingsbury.com/#fifteenminutes/c1kb4>



**BEST-SELLING AUTHOR
TRACIE PETERSON
CONCLUDES HER**

*Brides
of Seattle*
SERIES

Deidra Romero



The Stunning Conclusion that Fans have been Waiting For
This month Tracie Peterson concludes her *Brides of Seattle* historical series, which has captivated fans with a stunning cast of strong female characters. The final installment, titled *Love Everlasting* (Bethany House), wraps up the love story for Abrianna Cunningham, the protagonist throughout the series.

For this series, Tracie leveraged an interesting time in Seattle's history. In 1889 a tremendous fire destroyed most of downtown Seattle. "As I read about the details related to that fire and the aftermath, I was amazed at how quickly Seattle rose from the ashes," says Tracie. That time of rebuilding is covered during some of the series. This was also an interesting time in history for women. "Women in this time period had very little say over their lives, and yet there were those stalwart females who helped to shape the lives of the men around them."

Through her research Tracie learned of one man's unsuccessful attempts to lure young women to Seattle for the purpose of marriage. He started a bridal school to help train these young women, but the school was quite unsuccessful. Tracie wondered what it would be like if three older women had made the same attempt, but had been successful—how would that story play out? Thus the *Madison Bridal School* was born.

Abrianna is the one character that ties the three books in the series together. Readers can follow along

as this fiery young woman matures and grows in her faith. “Abrianna’s character would have avoided a great many problems had she done this, but then we wouldn’t have had a series detailing her exploits. Trusting in God and not our own understanding pretty much sums up what I hope the reader will take away,” says Tracie.

This novel tells of the attraction that has grown between Abrianna and her long-time friend, Wade. For so long Abrianna viewed him as a protective brother, but her feelings have slowly evolved into something more, which is exactly what Wade has been waiting for. Of this budding romance Tracie says, “Abrianna fears change because she’s grown accustomed to her independent life, and she likes it that way. Throughout her spiritual journey she will come to terms with change

and dependency, as well as love and its many forms.”

As any seasoned romance reader knows, there’s always something that comes up to keep the love interests apart. In this case, it is bachelor Priam Welby who has been pursuing Abrianna for some time. His tactics have not been the most honest or trustworthy, but will Abrianna be able to discern that?

Tracie says she loved telling these characters stories in this setting and when asked about adding to the series, she admitted, “I never say never. I really loved the setting and the characters. The bridal finishing school was a wonderful setting for diversity and new character focus, and I think it would be a lot of fun to write another series, say set twenty years or so in the future.” Tracie loves hearing from her fans about what stories they would enjoy. “Often they encourage me to tell the story of a minor character or to let them see into the lives of the characters years later. It’s always fun to accommodate them.” **FF**



LOVE EVERLASTING
BRIDES OF SEATTLE #3
Tracie Peterson
Bethany House

You can connect with Tracie on her website or through Facebook.

▶ <http://www.traciepeterson.com/>

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A photograph of a balcony with two wicker rocking chairs and a pair of brown boots. The chairs are made of dark wood with woven cane backs and seats. They have red and black plaid cushions. The floor is made of large, light-colored tiles with a dark, swirling pattern. In the background, there is a wooden railing and a wall with a decorative pattern of small, round, light-colored tiles. A large potted plant is visible behind the chairs. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

ELIZABETH BYLER YOUNTS

Here to Stay

Deidra Romero



The Amish Author on her New Release, *Promise to Keep*
Elizabeth Byler Younts is different from most Amish authors. She was raised in an Amish community as a child and draws on personal memories and family history to infuse her plots with real-life impact. Her third novel, *Promise to Keep* (Howard Books), concludes her debut Promise of Sunrise series. And it's clear to Amish fiction fans, this won't be the last we see of her.

The mission of Jesus was to reach out to the marginalized and forgotten—to do unto the “least of these.” Elizabeth has taken that message to heart and translated it to fiction with her Promise of Sunrise series. “Each [book] provides a look at those people who are often marginalized within our society: conscientious objectors, those suffering from mental illness, Down syndrome, orphans, the hearing-impaired, and even an Amish woman who intentionally chooses to remain unmarried even in her thirties.”

Her latest release, *Promise to Keep*, tells the story of Esther, a young Amish woman who was orphaned as a child and was raised by her grandmother. After Esther's grandmother dies, she is left to care for her deceased cousin's deaf daughter, Daisy. The 7-year-old was abandoned by her father, and Esther provides her with the love and care a growing child needs. Esther, like Daisy, knows what it feels like to live on the fringes of society. Esther has always been independent with a strong exterior. As a woman who has chosen to remain unmarried, she becomes the “least” in her community. Esther is

THE MISSION OF JESUS WAS TO REACH OUT TO THE MARGINALIZED AND FORGOTTEN. ELIZABETH HAS TAKEN THAT MESSAGE TO HEART AND TRANSLATED IT TO FICTION WITH HER PROMISE OF SUNRISE SERIES.

determined to help Daisy succeed in a world made for the hearing.

“No one fought for Esther as an orphaned child. This reality drives many of Esther’s decisions, including to fight for Daisy—to help her to learn to communicate in a culture that considers the deaf dispensable,” says Elizabeth. Problems arise for the pair when Daisy’s Marine father, Joe, returns from World War II and wants to resume care of Daisy. “She does not plan to give Daisy up too easily to a man who abandoned the little girl when life got difficult,” Elizabeth adds about Esther.

Esther soon learns that she and Joe have more in common than she originally thought and an attraction between the two grows. Of the couple Elizabeth says, “Joe and Esther carry deep wounds from their pasts and as a result they have an intense and less predictable romance.”

Joe soon decides the best thing for Daisy is for her to attend a school for the deaf. But what will this decision do to the seedling of a romance between him and Esther?

Answers are delivered as Elizabeth concludes her series set in Sunrise, Delaware. When asked about her future literary plans, Elizabeth could not elaborate but did assure us that this is not the last we will see from her! “Yes, there will be more and I will continue to share the stories of those who are often forgotten or misunderstood. Please stay tuned!” **FF**



PROMISE TO KEEP
PROMISE OF SUNRISE
Elizabeth Byler Younts
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3 Suspenseful Amish Reads for October

If you are looking for a book this fall that has everything—suspense, intrigue, romance—all set in an Amish community, look no further! Here are three Amish suspense novels that will keep you guessing and turning pages.



***When Secrets Strike* by Marta Perry** (HQN Books)

There's an arsonist on the loose. And the one suspected of these gruesome crimes is someone Sarah Bitler knows quite well—someone who broke her heart once before. Now a widower with two children, Aaron returns to Sarah's life and with it old feelings surface as well as suspicions. Can Sarah get to the truth and help prove Aaron's innocence? Or will her efforts only bring her closer to a killer? Marta Perry will keep you on the edge of your seat with this suspenseful read!

<http://www.familyfiction.com/authors/marta-perry/books/when-secrets-strike/>



***Her Brother's Keeper* by Beth Wiseman** (Thomas Nelson)

Charlotte will do anything it takes to discover the truth behind her brother's death—even if it means lying and sneaking her way into an Amish community. But of course, everything changes when Charlotte meets a meek Amish man named Isaac. Charlotte must decide what she is willing to risk as new alliances are made and truth is slowly uncovered in the place her brother once called home. Beth Wiseman sets the stage for mystery and intrigue with the first novel in her Amish Secrets series.

<http://www.familyfiction.com/authors/beth-wiseman/books/her-brother-s-keeper-amish-secrets/>

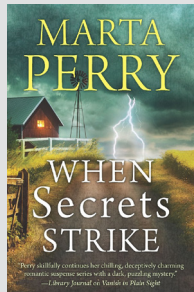


***Plain Pursuit* by Alison Stone** (Love Inspired Suspense)

FBI Agent Eli Miller is tormented by a cold case. The one place he believes he can find answers is the place he left a long time ago in Apple Creek's plain community. When Anna Quinn turns up in Apple Creek looking for answers about her brother's death, she and Eli find an alliance but are met with a stone cold silence from the Plain people in Apple Creek. Can they discover the truth and the connection between the two crimes? Alison Stone thrills fans in this edge-of-your-seat Amish novel.

<http://www.familyfiction.com/authors/alison-stone/books/plain-pursuit-love-inspired-suspense/>

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WHEN SECRETS STRIKE

Marta Perry
HQN Books



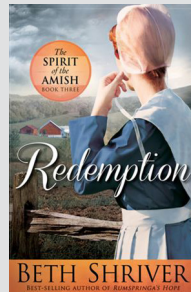
PROMISE TO KEEP

PROMISE OF
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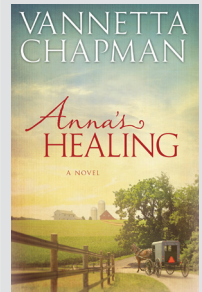
THE IMPOSTER

THE BISHOP'S FAMILY
Suzanne Woods
Fisher
Revell



REDEMPTION

Spirit of the Amish
Beth Shriver
Realms



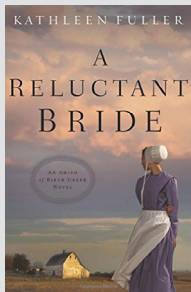
ANNA'S HEALING

PLAIN AND SIMPLE
MIRACLES
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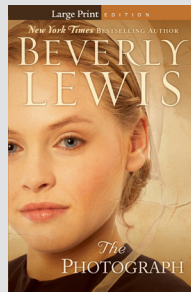
MIRIAM AND THE STRANGER

LAND OF PROMISE #3
Jerry S. Eicher
Harvest House



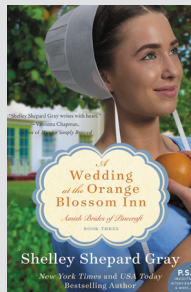
A RELUCTANT BRIDE

AMISH OF BIRCH
CREEK
Kathleen Fuller
Thomas Nelson



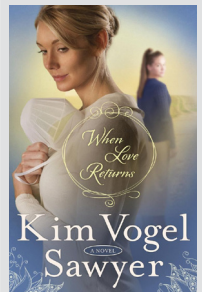
THE PHOTOGRAPH

Beverly Lewis
Bethany House



A WEDDING AT THE ORANGE BLOSSOM INN

THE PINECRAFT
BRIDES
Shelley Shepard Gray
Avon Inspire



WHEN LOVE RETURNS

Kim Vogel Sawyer
WaterBrook Press

Stephanie Grace Whitson is a master of historical fiction. With her new book, *Daughter of the Regiment* (FaithWords), she takes readers inside the lives of two very different women during a divisive time in history. Stephanie answered my questions about the inspiration behind this book and her hopes for readers.



What was behind your desire to write *Daughter of the Regiment*?

Loving history means I'm always reading history. Being a woman of faith means I'm generally seeking the women's side of historical events and asking myself how they managed to survive a dramatic event or a particularly difficult time. I learned about the real Daughters of the Regiment while reading about women in the Civil War, and the moment I "met" some of those women, I knew I wanted to celebrate their contribution.

Who are the main characters in the book?

Maggie Malone is an Irish immigrant who really doesn't want to have anything to do with the North/South conflict. In her opinion, her two brothers should "let the Americans

settle it." But then an Irish Brigade is formed in St. Louis, and Maggie's brothers volunteer. She's thrust into the middle of the conflict in a very personal way and forced into situations that challenge her idea about her own identity, both as a woman and as an immigrant.

Elizabeth "Libby" Blair is the mistress of her brother's plantation in the part of Missouri known as Little Dixie. She's been thrust upon him because of the death of her parents, and he sees her as little more than a tool to be used to help him get what he wants, which is political power and status. Like Maggie, Libbie hasn't ever really questioned her personal place in the world. When her brother forms a volunteer militia and the plantation becomes first a campground and then a field hospital, Libbie is also forced into situations that challenge her idea about her own identity and beliefs.



**DAUGHTER OF THE REGIMENT:
A NOVEL**

Stephanie Grace Whitson
FaithWords

“I LEARNED ABOUT THE REAL DAUGHTERS OF THE REGIMENT WHILE READING ABOUT WOMEN IN THE CIVIL WAR, AND THE MOMENT I ‘MET’ SOME OF THOSE WOMEN, I KNEW I WANTED TO CELEBRATE THEIR CONTRIBUTION.”

Maggie and Libbie come face to face in the aftermath of a battle. Libbie is looking for her brother among the Southern dead, and Maggie is tending the wounded.

In three sentences, what is *Daughter of the Regiment* about?

Two women from opposite sides of the social ladder must face events that force them to question everything they’ve been raised to believe about themselves, about God, and their country.

How do you believe this story relates to the lives of readers?

We should all think through what we believe at a fundamental level about God and about our role in the world. Do we believe those things because we were raised to believe them, or do we believe them because we think they are true truth?

What sort of research was required for this book?

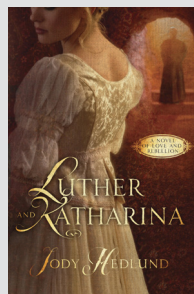
I probably spend as much (if not more) time researching as I do writing a story. I don’t feel that I can move, feed, or clothe my characters until I’ve done some basic research about the time and place. I can’t understand my characters within the context of their time in history until I’ve read a lot about that time in history. I place imaginary friends into real events.

Can you give us a hint at the next book in the series?

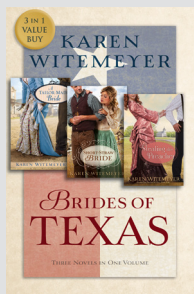
I’m having a great time learning about the Pony Express and putting Annie Paxton and her brothers Frank and Emmet into that exciting, pivotal time of western history.

HISTORICAL NEW RELEASES

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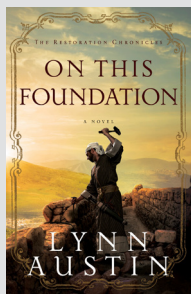
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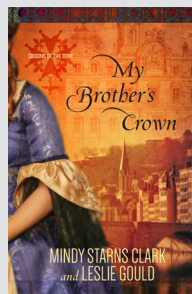
BRIDES OF TEXAS
Karen Witemeyer
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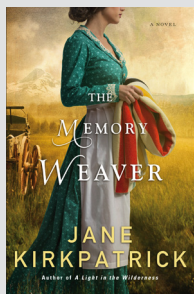
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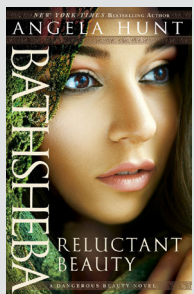
ON THIS FOUNDATION
THE RESTORATION CHRONICLES #3
Lynn Austin
Bethany House



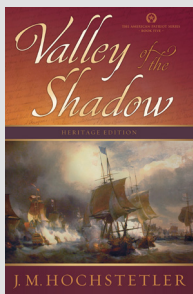
MY BROTHER'S CROWN
COUSINS OF THE DOVE
Mindy Starns Clark & Leslie Gould
Harvest House



THE MEMORY WEAVER
Jane Kirkpatrick
Revell



BATHSHEBA: RELUCTANT BEAUTY
DANGEROUS BEAUTY #2
Angela Hunt
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VALLEY OF THE SHADOW
THE AMERICAN PATRIOT
J.M. Hochstetler
Sheaf House



THE LOST HEIRESS
LADIES OF THE MANOR
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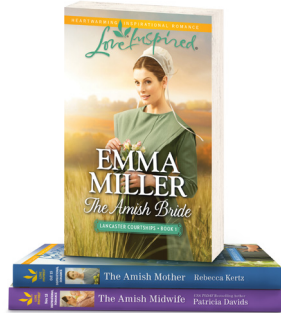


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SPECIAL

EXCERPT



from *Love Inspired*
INSPIRATIONAL ROMANCE
TO WARM YOUR HEART & SOUL

Read on for a sneak preview of *The Amish Bride* by Emma Miller—the first book in the brand-new trilogy, *Lancaster Courtships*.

"I'm glad you came for ice cream, Ellen. I wanted to talk to you. Alone," Nezhiah said. "Dat! Look at me!" Asa cried from the playground.

"I see you!" Nezhiah waved and looked back at Ellen. "Well, not *exactly* alone," he said wryly.

He continued. "I wanted to talk to you about this whole courting business. First, I want to apologize for my *vadder's*..." He shook his head. "I don't even know what to call it."

"You don't have to apologize, Nezhiah. My *vadder* was a part of it, too," she told him. "I know our parents mean well, but sometimes it might be better if they didn't get so...*involved*."

He smiled and looked down at his hands. "My father can sometimes be meddlesome, but this time I think our fathers might have a point."

Ellen looked at Nezhiah, thinking she must have misheard him. "You think..." She just stared at him for a moment in confusion. "You mean you think our fathers have a point in saying it's time we each thought

about getting married?"

He met her gaze. He was the same Nezhiah she had once thought she was in love with, the same warm, dark eyes, but there was something different now. A confidence she hadn't recalled seeing on his plain face.

"Yes. And I think that you and I, Ellen—" he covered her hand with his "—should consider courting again."

Ellen was so shocked, it was a wonder she didn't fall off the picnic table bench. This was the last thing on earth she expected to hear from him. The warmth of his hand on hers made her shiver...and not unpleasantly. She pulled her hand away. "Nezhiah, I..."

"The past is the past," he said when she couldn't finish her thought. "We were both young then. But we're older now. Wiser. Neither of us is the same stubborn young person we once were." He kept looking at her, his gaze searching hers. "Ellen, I was in love with you once and I think—" he glanced at his boys "—I think I'm still in love with you." He looked back at her. "I *know* I am."

Love Inspired

FALL IN LOVE WITH LANCASTER COURTSHIPS

A TRILOGY OF LIFE AND LOVE IN AMISH COUNTRY



THE AMISH BRIDE by EMMA MILLER

Ellen Beachey never thought she'd marry—now she has two prospects! To become the wife and mother she's always longed to be, she'll have to choose between handsome widower Nezhiah Shetler or his easygoing younger brother, Micah.



THE AMISH MOTHER by REBECCA KERTZ

Widow Lizzie King is set on proving to brother-in-law Zachariah Fisher she's the best mother and caretaker for her late husband's children and lands. She's soon taken by surprise by the overwhelming feelings the handsome man inspires in her.



THE AMISH MIDWIFE by PATRICIA DAVIDS

Sparks fly when Joseph Lapp is forced to ask midwife Anne Stoltzfus for help in taking care of his infant niece. Will they be able to put their neighborly quarrels behind and realize that they're a perfect fit?

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ROMANCE

AUTUMN BRIDES

Fall in Love with *Autumn Brides: A Year of Weddings Novella Collection*
Join in on the flash fiction craze! Zondervan's latest installment in the Year of Weddings Novella Collection is the perfect way to welcome falling leaves and cooler temperatures.

If you find your back-to-school season busier than other times, perhaps flash fiction is the best way to squeeze in your reading. With *Autumn Brides: A Year of Weddings Novella Collection*, readers can enjoy three novellas from three all-star authors—Kathryn Springer, Katie Ganshert, and Beth K. Vogt. Each of these authors have vibrant solo careers but have teamed up to bring fans shorter romances.

In *A September Bride* by Kathryn Springer, Annie relocates to a small town to take over an elderly woman's bookshop. But her son, the town's deputy, is less than thrilled with his mother's decision to hire someone she met online. When this deputy steps in to keep a closer eye on Annie, sparks begin to fly and the unthinkable happens.

In Katie Ganshert's *An October Bride*, Emma and Jake are rushing to the altar just so Emma's dying father can walk her down the aisle. However, their arrangement gets very complicated as deeper feelings come to the surface.

A November Bride by Beth K. Vogt is a story of the pitfalls of modern romance. Sadie wants to find a man who will put down his phone long enough to have an in-depth conversation with her. She decides to take matters into her own hands (and throw caution to the wind) when it comes to Erik, an eligible bachelor. However, can Erik convince her that beneath the fun they've had lies the potential for true love?

With the convenience of short fiction, readers can look forward to "taste-testing" authors they have never read before. Also, each novella can be read in one or two sittings, making this collection the perfect grab-and-go book of the season.



AUTUMN BRIDES: A YEAR OF WEDDINGS NOVELLA COLLECTION

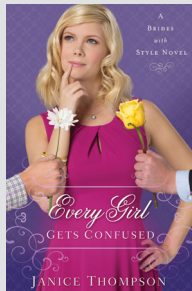
Kathryn Springer, Katie Ganshert
& Beth K. Vogt
Zondervan

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ROMANCE

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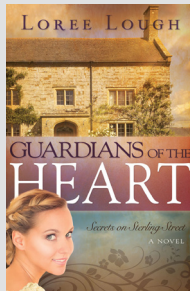
EVERY GIRL GETS CONFUSED
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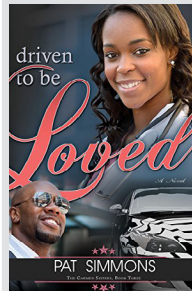
LOVE EVERLASTING
BRIDES OF SEATTLE #3
Tracie Peterson
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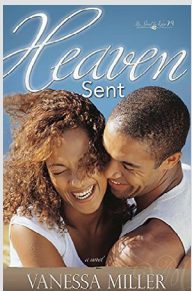
FIRE AND ICE
WILD AT HEART #3
Mary Connealy
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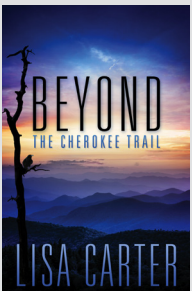
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SECRETS ON STERLING STREET
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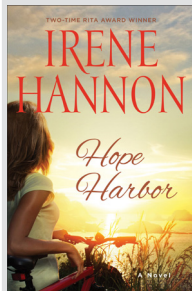
BEYOND THE CHEROKEE TRAIL
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BRIDES OF SEATTLE #2
Tracie Peterson
Bethany House



LAST CHANCE HERO
A PLACE TO CALL HOME #4
Cathleen Armstrong
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HOPE HARBOR
Irene Hannon
Revell

Kellie Coates Gilbert has delighted fans with her Texas Gold series. This fall, Kellie adds to her series with the third installment, *A Reason to Stay* (Revell). In this novel, her main character, Faith, fights to live after a brain injury but she must also decide if she will fight for her marriage.



What is the tie that binds these three books together in your Texas Gold series?

The Texas Gold series offers four highly emotional contemporary stories set in the four metropolitan cities of Texas. Each features a strong female protagonist who exhibits strength and dignity after she finds herself in a life-changing circumstance.

A Reason to Stay is the third release in the Texas Gold novels and will be available on October 6.

How did you find inspiration for this plot?

I'm a former legal professional and my stories often pull ideas from courtroom cases I've worked on or stories in the news. *A Reason To Stay* is no different.

In early 2011, I watched with the rest of the country as news media reported on the terrible shooting that left Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords fighting for her life. Like so many, I followed her painful journey to

healing and prayed for her recovery. Ms. Giffords' story hit very close to home.

While I was not a victim of a shooting, years back I suffered a stroke, the result of a brain bleed that required multiple cranial surgeries and a protracted hospital recovery. I personally knew some of what Gabby faced and my heart was broken for her. I knew I wanted to use that struggle in a story.

Your main character, Faith, is in a difficult circumstance with her marriage. What was it like to get inside of her marriage problems and try to figure those out?

A Reason to Stay became a very personal story. Not only does Faith Marin face a brain injury and the subsequent struggles to recover, but her real fight is in keeping her marriage intact.

This past summer, my husband and celebrated thirty-five years of marriage, a landmark in a journey marked with opposition. Looking back, I know that we only made it by the grace of God.

Over the course of our years together, both of us had to make a decision. I'm grateful we chose to stay.



A REASON TO STAY

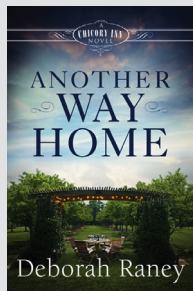
TEXAS GOLD #3

Kellie Coates Gilbert
Revell

CONTEMPORARY

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ANOTHER WAY HOME
CHICORY INN #3
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A REASON TO STAY
TEXAS GOLD
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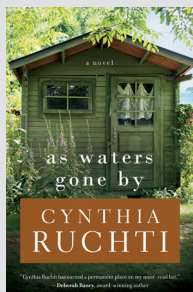
MIND OF HER OWN
Diana Lesire
Brandmeyer
Tyndale House



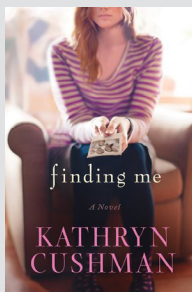
SOMEDAY HOME
Lauraine Snelling
Faithwords



TWO ROADS HOME
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Deborah Raney
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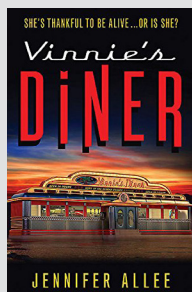
AS WATERS GONE BY
Cynthia Ruchti
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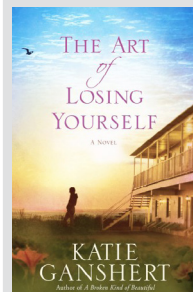
FINDING ME
Kathryn Cushman
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SUMMER BY SUMMER
Heather Burch
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VINNIE'S DINER
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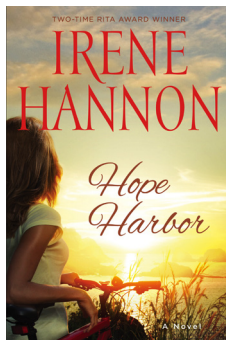
THE ART OF LOSING YOURSELF
Katie Ganshert
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SPECIAL

EXCERPT



START READING NOW

***Hope Harbor* by Irene Hannon**

Published with Permission by Revell

Closed until June 13

Michael Hunter stared at the hand-lettered sign on the Gull Motel office, expelled a breath, and raked his fingers through his hair.

Not the welcome he'd been expecting after a mind-numbing thirty-six-hour cross-country drive to the Oregon coast.

And where was he supposed to stay for the next three weeks, until the place opened again?

Reining in the urge to kick the door, he leaned close to the glass and peered into the dim, deserted office. Rattled the rigid knob. Scanned the small, empty parking lot.

The sign hadn't lied. This place was out of commission.

He swiveled toward the marina down the hill, where boats bobbed in the gentle swells. The motel might be a bust, but at least Hope Harbor was as picturesque as promised. Planters overflowing with colorful flowers served as a buffer between the sidewalk and the sloping pile of boulders that led to the water. Across the wide street from the marina, quaint storefronts faced the sea. A white gazebo occupied a small park where the two-block-long, crescent-shaped frontage road dead-ended at a river. More shops lined the next street back, many adorned with bright awnings and flower boxes.

The town was exactly what he'd expected.

SPECIAL EXCERPT

But with the only motel closed, it didn't appear he'd be calling it home during his stay in the area.

A prick of anger penetrated his fatigue. Why had the clerk let him book a room if the motel was going to shut down for several weeks? And why hadn't someone corrected the mistake in the thirty days since he'd put down his deposit?

If shoddy business practices like this were indicative of the much-touted laid-back Pacific Northwest lifestyle, the locals could have it—especially since such sloppiness meant he was now going to have to find another place to rest his very weary head.

He reached for the phone on his belt, frowning when his fingers met air. Oh, right. He'd taken it off as he'd rolled out of Chicago two days ago—a very deliberate strategy to make a clean break from work. Wasn't that the point of a leave of absence, after all?

But the cell was close at hand.

Back at his car, he opened the trunk, rooted around in the smaller of his two bags, and pulled it out.

Three messages popped up once he powered on, all from the Gull Motel.

He played the first one back, from a woman named Madeline who identified herself as the manager.

"Mr. Hunter, I'm afraid we've had an electrical fire and will be closing for about three weeks for repairs. Please call me at your earliest convenience so we can help you find other lodging." She recited her number.

The second and third messages were similar.

So the shutdown had been unexpected, and someone had tried to call him.

Slowly he inhaled a lungful of the fresh sea air, forcing the taut muscles in his shoulders to relax. Driving for fifteen hours two days in a row and getting up at the crack of dawn this morning to finish the trip must have done a number on his tolerance. Giving people the benefit of the doubt was much more his style. Besides, he was used to operating on the fly, finding creative solutions to problems. Glitches never phased him. His ability to roll with the punches was one of the things Julie had loved about him.

SPECIAL EXCERPT

Julie.

His view of the harbor blurred around the edges, and he clenched his teeth.

Let it go, Hunter. Self-pity won't change a thing. Move on. Get your life back.

It was the same advice he'd been giving himself for months—and he intended to follow it.

As soon as he figured out how.

Fighting off a wave of melancholy, he tapped in the number the woman had provided, his index finger less than steady on the keypad. For a moment he examined the tremors, then shoved his hand in his pocket. He was tired, that's all. He needed food and sleep, in that order. The sooner the better. Things would seem brighter tomorrow.

They had to.

If this trip didn't help him sort out his life, he was out of options.

While the phone rang, he looked toward the harbor again, past the long jetty on the left and the pair of rocky islands on the right that tamed the turbulent waves and protected the boats in the marina. His gaze skimmed across the placid surface of the sea, moving all the way to the horizon where cobalt water met deep blue sky. From his perch on the hill, the scene appeared to be picture perfect.

But it wasn't. Nothing was. Not up close. That was the illusion of distance. It softened edges, masked flaws, obscured messy detail.

It also changed perspective.

If he was lucky, this trip would do all those things for him—and more.

"Mr. Hunter? This is Madeline King. I've been trying to reach you."

He shifted away from the peaceful panorama and adjusted the phone against his ear. "I've been traveling cross-country and my cell was off. I'm at the motel now. What can you suggest as an alternative?"

"Unfortunately, there aren't many options in Hope Harbor. But there are a number of very nice places in Coos Bay or Bandon."

SPECIAL EXCERPT

As she began to rattle off the names of hotels, he stifled a sigh. He hadn't driven all the way out here to stay in either of those towns. He'd come to spend time in Hope Harbor.

"Isn't there anything closer?"

At his abrupt interruption, the woman stopped speaking. "Um ... not anything I'd recommend. I could probably find you a B&B that's closer, but those are on the pricey side. Most people book them for a night or two at most, and I believe you intended to stay for several weeks. Plus, B&Bs tend to be geared to couples."

Good point. A cozy inn would only remind him how alone he was.

"Okay ... why don't you line me up with someplace for a few nights while I decide what I want to do. Bandon would be my preference, since it's closer."

"I'll get right on it."

"Don't rush." He inspected the two-block-long business district, such as it was. "I'm going to wander around town for a while and grab a bite to eat."

"Sounds like a plan. And again, I'm sorry for the inconvenience."

Once they said their good-byes, he grabbed a jacket from the backseat and locked the car. The midday sun was warm, but the breeze was cool—by his standards, anyway. Perhaps a slight nip in the air was normal for Oregon in the third week of May, though.

Stomach growling, he started down the hill. If he weren't famished, he'd head the opposite direction and check out the big, empty beach at the base of the bluffs on the outskirts of town that he'd spotted as he drove in. A walk on the sand past the sea stacks arrayed offshore would be far more enjoyable than wandering along—he glanced at the street sign as he arrived at the bottom of the hill—Dockside Drive.

The two-block waterfront street didn't take long to traverse, and by the time he was halfway down the second block it was clear his food options were limited to a bakery and a bait-and-tackle shop with a sign advertising takeout sandwiches for the fishing crowd.

All the real restaurants must be in the business district, one street removed from the marina.

Just as he was about to retrace his steps, a spicy, appetizing

SPECIAL EXCERPT

scent wafted his way. He squinted toward the end of the block, where a white truck with a serving window on one side was perched at the edge of the tiny waterside park with the gazebo. Charley's, according to the colorful lettering above the window where a couple of people were giving orders to a guy with a weathered face and long gray hair pulled back in a ponytail.

Another whiff of an enticing aroma set off a loud clamor in his stomach.

Sold. Whatever they were cooking, he was eating.

With a quick change of direction, he stepped off the sidewalk to cross the street.

"Hey! Watch it!"

At the frantic female voice, he swung around ... and jumped back just in time to avoid a collision with the bicycle heading directly toward him.

The cyclist, however, wasn't as fortunate.

She swerved away from him. Tottered a few more yards. Crashed to the pavement in a tangle of arms, legs, groceries, and wheel spokes.

It took him no more than a few seconds to recover enough to go to her aid, but by then she was already scrambling to her feet.

"Are you okay?"

She glared at him with vivid green eyes, rubbing her hip with one hand and shoving back the golden-brown hair that had escaped from her ponytail with the other.

"I'll live—but next time you might look before you charge into traffic."

"I'm sorry." Lame—but what else could he say? "Let me help you with your bike." He reached for it, but she beat him to it.

"I've got it." She set it on its wheels and gave it a quick once-over.

"If there's any damage, I'll be happy to pay for it."

She lowered the kickstand. "It's in better shape than my groceries." Expression peeved, she surveyed the broken eggs on the pavement, then began gathering up the canned goods that had rolled a few yards away.

While she corralled the wayward tins, he picked up a package of

SPECIAL EXCERPT

ground beef and a semi-mashed loaf of bread. He also retrieved a crinkled white bakery bag. Through the gap in the top he spied a crushed cinnamon roll.

An instant later the bag was snatched from his grasp. "I can take it from here." She held out her hand for the bread and meat too.

His stomach bottomed out at the blood oozing from a nasty scrape on the fleshy part of her palm, below her thumb. "You're hurt."

She gave the abrasion a quick inspection as she plucked the meat and bread from his grasp. "It's not bad. I'll deal with it after I get home." She turned her back and continued to repack her plastic grocery bags.

"Look ... let me replace the damaged food at least."

"Don't worry about it." She tucked the bags into the baskets on either side of her back fender and swung one long, jeans-clad leg over the bar on the bike. "Just look before you leap next time, okay?"

With that, she pushed off, did a U-turn, and pedaled back down the street.

Michael followed her progress until she disappeared around the corner, then shoved his hands into his pockets.

What else could go wrong today?

Appetite evaporating, he detoured to one of the benches spaced along the waterfront. Nice of the town to provide a spot for residents and visitors to chill out and let their cares melt away.

Except his didn't.

Instead, the familiar emptiness and dark despair that had been his steady companions for the past eighteen months crept over him, casting a pall nothing could overcome—not the bright sunlight, not the two thousand miles he'd put between himself and his memories, not the upbeat name of this town that had beckoned him, holding out the promise of a better tomorrow.

Hope Harbor?

He rested his elbows on his knees and dropped his head in his hands, snuffing out the idyllic view.

As far as he was concerned, whoever named this place had goofed.

SPECIAL EXCERPT

Anna Williams handed her money to Charley Lopez as he passed her order through the window of the food truck, then sniffed the to-go bag. "Smells delicious. What's the secret ingredient today?"

Charley's smile revealed two rows of gleaming white teeth in his latte-colored face. "Nothing special. A fish taco is a fish taco."

"Not when you make them. What kind of fish did you use?"

"You planning to give me some competition?"

She snorted. "I'm sixty-nine. My professional cooking days are over."

He rested his elbows on the counter, looked left and right, and lowered his voice. "Halibut—with a touch of cilantro. The rest"—he winked and snapped his fingers—"is magic." Leaning sideways, he snagged another parchment-wrapped bundle and held it out to her. "Would you mind giving this to that guy on the bench as you pass? He seems like he could use a pick-me-up."

Anna shifted sideways. The man's back was to her, but it didn't take Oprah-level empathy to recognize his posture of defeat. "Any idea who he is or what's wrong?"

"Not a clue."

Nor would their local taco expert attempt to find out. The man didn't miss a thing that went on in town, yet he never asked questions. Never gossiped. Never passed judgment.

Maybe that's why they got along.

"I guess I could give it to him." She took the extra order. "You want me to pass along a message too?"

"Yeah." Charley grabbed a slip of paper, scribbled a few words, and folded it in half. Resting an elbow on the counter, he leaned across and tucked it in a fold of the parchment paper. "I'd take the tacos over myself, but I've got more customers on the way." He gestured behind her as several guys in hard hats crossed the street, heading their way. "That repaving on 101 might be annoying for drivers, but it's been a boon for my business."

"Will you be cooking tomorrow?" Anna eased away from the window as the road crew approached.

"Depends on the weather and the catch of the day and my mood."

SPECIAL EXCERPT

Flashing her one more grin, he turned to greet the new arrivals.

Juggling her bag and the extra order of fish tacos, Anna started toward the man on the bench. Only Charley could have persuaded her to approach a stranger. Why, she hardly talked to people she'd known most of her life. What was the point? No one cared about you except family, and once they were gone ... well, it was best to make your peace with being alone.

Her step faltered, and she pivoted back toward the food truck. There was a line now, and Charley was bustling around inside. If he wasn't so busy, she'd march back there and tell him to deliver his own freebie.

On the other hand, he'd never asked a favor of her before—and it was hard to fault a kind gesture.

Resigned, she continued toward the bench, giving the man a once-over. He was still sitting with his head in his hands, a few flecks of silver glinting in his dark brown hair. Not one of the vagrants who occasionally passed through town, though. His jeans might be worn enough to put him in that category, but his shoes were polished leather. She shook her head. The way people dressed these days. This guy could be a yuppie—or whatever they called those upwardly mobile younger folks who liked to defy convention and do things their way. For all she knew, he was some Silicon Valley start-up executive who'd taken a road trip up the coast to bemoan the loss of a million-dollar deal.

No reason to feel sorry for someone like that.

Straightening her shoulders, she cleared her throat to get his attention. "Excuse me."

The man didn't respond.

"Sir? Excuse me."

At her more forceful tone, he lowered his hands and twisted around to face her.

Instantly the air whooshed out of her lungs.

Was that...?

She dropped the extra order of tacos on the seat of the bench and groped for the back to steady herself.

"Ma'am?" The man rose, concern creasing his brow. "Are you all

SPECIAL EXCERPT

right? Would you like to sit down?"

She focused on his eyes. Blue, not brown.

It wasn't John.

Of course it wasn't.

John hadn't set foot in this town for almost twenty years—nor was he likely to ever again.

But if, by chance, their paths ever did cross, she'd recognize him, thanks to today's wired world. And except for the eyes, this stranger could be his double. Same color hair, same build, same mid- to late-thirties age, same six-foot-twoish height.

What a bizarre coincidence.

"Ma'am?"

She sucked in a shaky breath. "I'm fine. You just ... you remind me of someone I haven't seen in quite a while."

"Why don't you sit for a minute?" He picked up the order of tacos she'd dropped, making room on the bench.

Easing back, she started to shake her head. She'd be fine as soon as her heart stopped pounding. There was no reason to linger.

Yet looking at this man ... The resemblance was uncanny. It would be easy to pretend he was John.

A powerful yearning crashed over her, stalling her lungs again—but she quashed it at once. Wishing wouldn't change a thing. It was too late for such nonsense. What was done was done.

Still ... what harm could there be in indulging her little fantasy for a few minutes?

"I believe I will." She lowered herself to the bench, perching on the edge.

The man retook his seat and held out the order of tacos.

She waved it aside. "Those are for you. Compliments of the chef." She hooked a thumb toward the food truck.

Surprise flattened his features, and he turned toward Charley, who touched the brim of his Oregon Ducks baseball cap in salute.

"Why?" Her bench partner examined the package.

"He put a message inside ... there." Anna flicked the corner of the folded piece of paper.

The man removed it, read the words, and sent Charley a

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speculative look. Then he tucked the small slip of paper in his shirt pocket without offering to share the message.

Despite her curiosity, Anna curbed the urge to ask him about it. Sticking your nose in other people's business only led to trouble.

When the silence lengthened, she opened her bag, pulled out her own parchment-wrapped bundle, and pointed to his. "Go ahead, dive in. Best fish tacos on the West Coast." As long as she was sitting here, why not eat her own while they were hot and fresh instead of lugging them home, as usual?

Besides, eating would give her an excuse to extend their encounter.

Slowly the man unwrapped the paper. "They smell great."
"Charley's got a magic touch."

The man bit into a taco, the tension fading from his features as he chewed. "This is amazing." He wolfed down two while she worked on her first, slowing only as he picked up the last one.

"You must have been hungry." She swiped up a glob of sauce that had dropped onto the parchment in her lap. Why did good things always have to be messy?

"More than I realized. I've been on the road for two and a half very long days and didn't stop too often for food."

"Where are you from?"

"Chicago."

"That is a long drive. You just passing through?"

A shadow passed over his face. "I might be now. I'd intended to stay for a few weeks, but the motel is closed. They're trying to line up another place in Bandon or Coos Bay, but Hope Harbor was my destination. It won't be the same if I stay somewhere else."

I, I, I. No mention of a wife, though he wore a ring.

Interesting.

"You've been here before?"

His eyes shuttered and he went back to eating. "No."

In the sudden silence, his "back off" message came through loud and clear.

Fine. People had a right to privacy, especially about painful subjects. They didn't need to be poked and prodded and

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questioned by nosy strangers ... or by well-meaning friends. And pain radiated from this man's pores—pain that was somehow related to Hope Harbor.

He finished his last taco, wadded up the paper, and tossed it in the small trash receptacle beside the bench. "Thank you for delivering my lunch. I'll stop by and give my compliments to the chef too. If I end up staying around, he's got himself a new ..." He stopped, pulled his phone off his belt, and checked the screen. "The manager from the Gull Motel. I guess they found me a place to stay. Excuse me."

As he angled away on the seat, Anna finished her second taco and tuned in to his side of the conversation.

"Are you sure there wasn't anything in Bandon? ... When does it end? ... But that would mean packing up again Monday ... Yeah, I suppose." He sighed and dug through his pockets for a pen and paper. "Go ahead and give me the details."

While he took notes, Anna rewrapped her third taco for an evening snack. Madeline must have told him about the antique car rally in Bandon this weekend. The way that annual event had grown, every hotel room was probably booked. Her bench mate was going to end up in Coos Bay—much farther away from Hope Harbor than he'd planned.

Unless...

The idea that popped into her mind was so startling—and out of character—she stopped breathing. Where on earth had that preposterous notion come from? Was she crazy? This man was a stranger. He might be a criminal. Or a deadbeat. Or one of those con men who coozied up to unsuspecting seniors, then took advantage of them.

No. Scratch that last item. She'd approached him, not vice versa.

Nevertheless ...why would she even consider making such an offer?

Because he looks like John.

Her fingers crimped the edges of the package in her lap, the parchment crackling in protest. What a stupid reason to get all Good Samaritanish. Let him stay in Coos Bay and commute. The

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drive wasn't that...

"It appears I have a room." The man slid his phone back onto his belt and stood, his weary smile tinged with a soul-deep fatigue. "I'd better be on my way. Thank you again." He extended his hand.

Say good-bye and good luck, Anna.

Still clutching her taco and the empty bag, she rose. "I live in town. I might be able to offer you a place to stay." Her words came out stilted. Choppy.

His eyes widened slightly and he lowered his hand. "I beg your pardon?"

The man couldn't be any more shocked than she was. That was not what she'd intended to say.

Yet for some strange reason, the offer felt right.

And in truth, what harm could there be? It wasn't as if he'd be sharing her living space.

Letting her instincts guide her, she slid her taco into the bag and rolled down the top as she spoke. "I have a small annex on my house, with its own entrance and a kitchenette. I used to rent it to tourists, but they came and went so quickly the whole thing was more trouble than it was worth. If you're planning to stay for an extended time, though, I'd consider letting you use it. It would be far more economical than a motel." She quoted him her old weekly price.

He was still staring at her as if she'd invited him to join her for a rocket ride to the moon. "But ... you don't even know my name."

As the idea began to take hold, her usual cut-to-the-chase manner returned. "That's easy to fix. I'll start. Anna Williams. I've lived here since I came as a bride more than forty years ago. Worked in the high school kitchen most of my life. These days I cook for Father Murphy and Reverend Baker. Feel free to talk with them if you want references. Their churches are at opposite ends of town, but I expect they're on the golf course today if they're following their usual Thursday afternoon routine. You can also stop in at the police department and talk to the chief. I used to babysit her. And you are?"

"Michael Hunter."

"Are you a wanted man?"

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He blinked. “No. I, uh, took a leave of absence from my job in Chicago for ...personal reasons.”

“Nothing related to alcohol or drugs, I hope.” She gave him the same stern look she’d used to intimidate the high school boys who tried to pilfer an extra cookie in the lunch line.

“No.” A glint of amusement sparked in his eyes, bringing them to life for a fleeting second. “You could have your sheriff check me out too, if you like.”

“I may do that.” She set her purse and taco on the seat of the bench, pulled out a notebook, and wrote down her address. “You can stop by in a couple of hours if you’d like to see the place. It’ll take me that long to put things in order.” She ripped out the sheet and handed it to him. “Are you interested? I don’t want to waste my afternoon cleaning if you’re not.”

He studied her, slowly nodding. “Yeah. I think so.” He dug around in his pocket and pulled out a business card. “Here’s a little more information about me for your sheriff to work with.”

She adjusted her glasses as he handed it over. Michael P. Hunter, chief executive officer of St. Joseph Center—“dedicated to dignity, self-sufficiency, and independence,” according to the tagline. Must be some sort of Christian-based charitable endeavor that helped get people on their feet and lead productive lives.

Impressive—assuming he was legit.

And her intuition told her he was.

She tucked the card in the pocket of her sweater and stuck out her hand. “It’s a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Hunter.”

His grip was warm and steady. “Likewise.” After a firm squeeze, he tipped his head toward the taco stand. “I’ll pay my respects to the chef. See you later this afternoon.”

With that, he strolled over to the truck and waited off to the side while Charley finished with a customer.

Anna walked the other direction, pausing at the corner. Charley was leaning on the counter, talking to Michael, and an echo of laughter drifted her way. Huh. The taco-stand owner had managed to inject some humor into her sober bench mate. Well, good for him. The man from Chicago seemed as if he could use a laugh.

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Then again, who couldn't?

The two men disappeared from view as she turned the corner ... along with some of her confidence. For all she knew, the card Michael had given her was a fake. St. Joseph Center might not even exist—though that would be simple to verify on the net. Still—picking a man up off the street....

If he was having as many second thoughts as she was, however, he might not bother to show up. And that could be for the best.

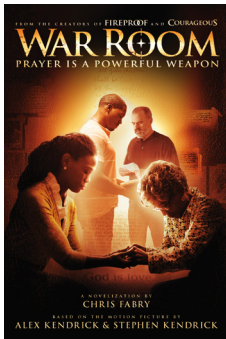
But you'll be disappointed.

Snuffing out the annoying little voice that was the bane of her existence, she picked up her pace. Fine. Maybe she did hope he'd follow through—but his resemblance to John had nothing to do with how she felt. The uncanny similarity might have drawn her to him at first, but the emptiness in his eyes had sucked her in. That young man had come here seeking relief from his pain. Searching for answers, perhaps, or resolution, or solutions. Why not help him if she could?

And if fate was kind, he might succeed far better than she had.

Because Hope Harbor had offered her none of those things for twenty long years.





START READING NOW

***War Room: Prayer is a Powerful Weapon* by Chris Fabry**

Published with Permission from Tyndale House

This summer's biggest box office success is changing lives and pointing people to Christ by the droves. The novelization of *War Room* (Tyndale House) was written by Chris Fabry and is sure to delight fans of the movie as well as non-movie goers, who prefer a book to the big screen. This novelization is climbing bestsellers lists, garnering the #17 slot on *Publishers Weekly's* Trade Paper bestseller list for weekly sales ending on August 30. It has also achieved #2 ranking on the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association (ECPA) Christian Fiction Bestseller list and #10 rank on their Christian Bestsellers list.

Elizabeth Jordan noticed everything wrong with the house she was selling before she ever knocked on the front door. She saw flaws in the landscaping and cracks in the driveway and a problem with the drainage of the roof near the garage. Just before she knocked three times, she saw chipping paint on a windowsill. This was her job. Presentation was everything. You had only one chance to make a first impression with a potential buyer.

She saw her reflection in a window and straightened her shoulders, tugging on her dark jacket. She had her hair back, which accentuated her strong face. Prominent nose, high forehead,

and chocolaty skin. Elizabeth had a lineage she could trace back over 150 years. She had taken a trip with her husband and infant daughter ten years earlier to a plantation in the Deep South where her great-great-great-grandmother had lived. The little shack had been rebuilt, along with other slave quarters on the property, and the owners had searched the country for any relatives. Just walking inside made her feel like she was touching the heart of her ancestors, and she fought back tears as she imagined their lives. She'd held her daughter close and thanked God for the perseverance of her people, their legacy, and the opportunities she had that they could never imagine.

Elizabeth waited until the door opened, then smiled at the slightly younger woman before her. Melissa Tabor held a box of household items and struggled to maintain the cell phone balanced on her shoulder. Her mouth rounded into an O.

"Mom, I gotta go," she said into the phone.

Elizabeth smiled, patiently waiting.

Over her shoulder, Melissa said, "Jason and David, get rid of the ball and help me with these boxes!"

Elizabeth wanted to reach out and help her but had to duck as a kickball flew past her head. It bounced harmlessly in the yard behind her and she laughed.

"Oh, I am so sorry," Melissa said. "You must be Elizabeth Jordan."

"I am. And you're Melissa?"

The box nearly fell as Melissa shook hands with Elizabeth. "Yes. I'm sorry. We just started packing."

"No problem. Can I help you with that?"

A man with a briefcase and a work folder slipped past them. "Honey, I gotta be in Knoxville at two. But I finished the closet." He held up a stuffed bear and dropped it into the box. "That was in the refrigerator."

He passed Elizabeth on the front step and stopped, pointing at her. "Real estate agent," he said, sounding proud of himself. Not a name but a title he put on her. She was someone to put in a pigeonhole in his head.

Elizabeth smiled and pointed back. "Software rep."

"How did you know that?" he said, his eyes wide.

"It's on that folder you're holding in your hand." She was just as good at categorizing and commentating. She had to work at the connecting with others. Especially with her husband.

He looked at the folder and nodded with a knowing chuckle as if impressed by her observational powers. "I would love to stay but I have to leave. My wife can answer everything about the house. We realize it's a disaster and we've agreed to blame it on our kids." He glanced at Melissa. "So I'll call you tonight."

"Love you," Melissa said, still holding the box.

With that he was gone, down the walk to the car. He passed the kickball and didn't seem to notice.

"I understand," Elizabeth said. "My husband does the same thing. Pharmaceuticals."

"Oh," Melissa said. "Does he get tired of the travel?"

"He doesn't seem to. I think he likes being able to drive and clear his head, you know? Instead of being cooped up in an office all day."

"While you're showing houses and dealing with people in big transitions."

Elizabeth stepped inside and noticed twelve things that would have to change if they were to make a sale. More first impressions. But she wouldn't list them all at the moment because she also saw something in Melissa's face that was close to panic.

"You know, they say that outside of death and divorce, moving is the most stressful change you go through." She put a hand on the woman's shoulder. "And this is probably not the first time you've moved in the past few years."

Melissa shook her head. "These are the same boxes we used last time."

Elizabeth nodded and saw missing paint on a ding in the wall but tried to focus. "You're going to get through this."

Right then a boy with spiked blond hair ran down the stairs, followed closely by another waving a tennis racket. Both were about the same age as Elizabeth's daughter and had enough energy to light a small city for a year. Who needed power plants

and windmills when you had adolescent boys?

Melissa sighed. "Are you sure about that?"



Tony Jordan had begun the day in an upscale suites hotel in Raleigh. He was up early, working out in the weight room alone—he loved the quiet, and most people on the road didn't work out at 5 a.m. Then he showered and dressed and had a bowl of fruit and some juice in the breakfast area. Other travelers hurried through, eating donuts or waffles or sugary cereal. He needed to stay fit and keep the edge so he could stay on his game, and his health was a big part of that. He'd always believed that if you had your health, you had everything.

Tony looked in the mirror as he headed out the door. His close-cropped hair was just the right length. The shirt and tie were crisp and hugged his running-back neck, strong and wide. His mustache was tightly trimmed above his upper lip, a goatee on his chin. He looked good. Confident. To tune up for the meeting later, he flashed a smile and stuck out a hand and said, "Hey, Mr. Barnes."

As an African American, he'd always felt like he was one step behind most of his white coworkers and competitors. Not because he lacked skill or ability or eloquence, but simply because of his skin color. Whether that was reality or not, he couldn't tell. How could he crawl inside the mind of someone meeting him for the first time? But he had felt the questioning looks, the split-second hesitation of someone who shook his hand the first time. He'd even felt it from his bosses at Brightwell, especially Tom Bennett, one of the vice presidents. Tony saw him as part of the old-boy network. Another white guy who knew somebody who knew somebody else and had eased into management, working his way a little too quickly up the ladder. Tony had tried to impress the man with his sales ability, his easygoing demeanor—the attitude that said, *I got this. Trust me.* But Tom was a hard sell, and Tony couldn't help but

wonder if his skin color had something to do with it.

Accepting the reality he perceived, Tony vowed he would simply work harder, push harder, and live up to every expectation. But in the back of his mind he felt this unseen hurdle wasn't fair. Other people with a lighter skin color didn't have to deal with it, so why should he?

The hurdle in front of him today was Holcomb. There was no getting around the difficulty of the sale. But what was an easy sale? Even the quick ones took time and preparation and knowing and seeing. This was his secret—the intangibles. Remembering names. Remembering details about the customer's life. Things like the Ping driver he had in the trunk.

Calvin Barnes was going to salivate when Tony pulled out that driver, as well he should. It had set Tony back a few hundred, but it was a small price to pay for the look on his boss's face when he heard Tony had sealed the deal.

The boardroom was tastefully decorated, the smell of leather permeating the hallway as he walked in and put his sample case on the redwood table. Calvin Barnes—who did not like to be called Calvin—would walk through the door and shake Tony's hand, so the driver needed to lean against the chair to Tony's left, out of view. He placed it there, then moved it into the chair and let the grip stick out over the back. When he heard voices down the hallway, he put the driver back on the floor. He needed to be more subtle.

Mr. Barnes walked in with another man—a familiar face, but for a moment Tony froze, unable to remember the man's name. He tried to relax, to recall the name using his mnemonic device. He'd pictured the man standing in a huge landfill with a John Deere hat on. Dearing. That was the last name. But he couldn't remember why he was standing in a land—

"Tony, you remember—"

"Phil Dearing," Tony said, extending a hand. "Good to see you again."

The man looked stunned, then smiled as he shook Tony's hand.

Mr. Barnes threw his head back and laughed. "You just won me twenty bucks. I told you he'd remember, Phil." His eyes fell on the

golf club. "And what have we here?"

"That's the one I was talking about, Mr. Barnes," Tony said. "I'll be shocked if it doesn't add at least thirty yards to every drive. Your job is to make sure they're straight down the middle."

Mr. Barnes picked up the driver and held it. He was a scratch golfer who played three times a week and had designs on retiring to Florida. An extra thirty yards on his drives meant Barnes could exploit his short game, which meant that seventy-two for eighteen holes could come down to a seventy. Maybe lower on a good day.

"The weight is just perfect, Tony. And the balance is phenomenal."

Tony watched him hold the club and was certain he had the sale even before he opened his case. When they'd signed the papers and cared for the legal parts of the transaction, Tony stood. He knew he cut an impressive figure in his suit and tie and athletic build.

"I need to get you back on the course and work on that putting of yours," Mr. Barnes said.

"Maybe next time I'm through," Tony said, smiling.

"You don't mind coming all the way out here—even this early?"

"No, I do not. I enjoy the drive."

"Well, we're excited to do business with you, Tony," Mr. Barnes said. "Tell Coleman I said hello."

"I'll do it."

"Oh, and thanks for the new driver."

"Hey, you enjoy it, okay?" Tony shook hands with them.

"Gentlemen, we'll be in touch."

He walked out of the room almost floating. There was no feeling like making a sale. As he neared the elevators, he could hear Calvin Barnes crowing about his new driver and how much he wanted to take the afternoon off and play the back nine at the nearest country club. While he waited, Tony checked his phone for anything he'd missed during the meeting, when he made a point of keeping it in his pocket. This was another thing he always tried to do. Value clients enough to make them the central focus. Never make your clients feel like there is anyone on the planet more important than them. They are your priority. Every. Time.

A young woman walked down a white staircase before him,

carrying a leather folder and smiling. He put his phone away and smiled back.

"I see you made the sale," she said.

He nodded confidently. "Of course."

"I'm impressed. Most guys run out with their tail between their legs."

Tony extended a hand. "I'm Tony Jordan."

"Veronica Drake," she said, shaking with him. Her hand was warm and soft. "I work for Mr. Barnes. I'll be your contact for the purchase."

She handed him her card and brushed his hand slightly. Nothing overt, but he felt something click with her touch. Veronica was vivacious and slim, and Tony imagined them together at some restaurant talking. Then he imagined them by romantic firelight, Veronica leaning toward him, her lips moist and pleading. All this happened in a second as he stared at her business card.

"Well, Veronica Drake, I guess I'll be seeing you again when I return in two weeks."

"I'll look forward to it," she said, and the way she smiled made him think she meant it.

She walked away and he turned and watched her a little too intently.

As he waited for the elevator, his phone beeped and he looked at the screen.

Bank Notice: Transfer.

Here he was with the biggest sale in months, something he'd worked on and planned intricately, and right at the apex of his elation at the sale, he'd been given another smackdown by his wife.

"Elizabeth, you're killing me," he whispered.



Elizabeth sat on the white ottoman at the foot of her bed rubbing her feet. The time with Melissa had been good—she'd been able to

make a list of all the repairs and staging decisions that had to be done. The two boys hadn't made things easier, but children always had a way of complicating home sales. It was something you just needed to work with and hope you could navigate.

It had been a long day, with another meeting in the afternoon and then getting home before Danielle arrived from her last day of school. By the time she sat down, Elizabeth was exhausted and ready to curl up and sleep, but there was more to be done. There was always more to be done.

"Mom?"

Elizabeth couldn't move. "I'm in here, Danielle."

Her ten-year-old daughter walked in carrying something. She had grown several inches in the last year, her thin, long body sprouting up like a weed. She wore a cute purple headband that highlighted her face. Elizabeth could see her father there—that bright smile, eyes full of life. Except her eyes were a little downcast.

"Here's my last report card. I still got one C."

Elizabeth took it and looked it over as Danielle sat and shrugged off her backpack.

"Oh, baby. You have an A in everything else. One C in math is not that bad. But you get a break for the summer, right?"

Danielle leaned forward and her face betrayed something. She sniffed and then reacted like the room was full of ammonia. "Is that your feet?"

Elizabeth self-consciously pulled her foot away. "I'm sorry, baby. I ran out of foot powder."

"That smells terrible."

"I know, Danielle. I just needed to take my shoes off for a minute."

Her daughter stared at her mother's feet like they were toxic waste. "That's, like, awful," she said, repulsed.

"Well, don't just sit there looking at them. Why don't you give me a hand and rub them right there?"

"Ewww, no way!"

Elizabeth laughed. "Girl, go set the table for dinner. When your daddy gets home, you can show him your report card, okay?"

Danielle took her report card into the kitchen, and Elizabeth

was alone again. The odor hadn't been a problem until a few years earlier, and the foot powder seemed to take care of it. But maybe she was kidding herself. Maybe the odor was the sign of some deeper problem.

What was she thinking? Some disease? Some problem with her liver that leaked out the pores of her feet? She had a friend, Missy, who was constantly looking online at various aches and pains and connecting them with her own symptoms. One day she'd be worried about a skin problem and conclude she had melanoma. The next day a headache would be self-diagnosed as a tumor. Elizabeth vowed she would not become a hypochondriac. She just had stinky feet.

She picked up one of her flats and sniffed. There'd been a cheese served at the hotel where she and Tony had honeymooned that smelled just like that. She dropped the shoe. Funny how a smell could trigger her brain to think about something that happened sixteen years earlier.

She ran her hand over the comforter and thought about that first night together. All the anticipation. All the excitement. She hadn't slept in two days and the wedding had been a blur. When her head hit the pillow in the honeymoon suite, she was just gone. Tony had been upset, and what red-blooded American male wouldn't be? But what red-blooded American females needed was a little understanding, a little grace.

She had made up for her honeymoon drowsiness the next day, but it was something they had to talk through. Tony had talked a lot in the year they had dated and been engaged, but not long after the *I dos*, something got his tongue and the river of words slowed to a drip. She wished she could find the valve or tell where to place the plunger to get him unclogged.

They didn't have a bad marriage. It wasn't like those celebrities on TV who went from one relationship to the next or the couple down the street who threw things onto the lawn after every argument. She and Tony had produced a beautiful daughter and they had stable careers. Yes, he was a little aloof and they'd grown apart, but she was sure that drift wouldn't last forever. It couldn't.

Elizabeth put her shoes away, as far back into the closet as she could, then went to the kitchen to start dinner. She filled a pot with water, put it on the stove, and dumped in the spaghetti. The water came to a slow boil, and she stirred the tomato sauce in a pan next to it.

Elizabeth watched the spaghetti, feeling something happening, something boiling inside her. A stirring she couldn't put her finger on. Call it restlessness or longing. Call it fear. Maybe this was all she could hope for. Maybe this was as good as marriage got. Or life, for that matter. Maybe they were destined to go separate ways and occasionally meet in the middle. But she had a nagging feeling that she was missing something. That their marriage could be more than two people with a nice house who rarely spent time together.

Elizabeth was busy with the salad and Danielle was putting napkins next to each plate at the table when the garage door began its hideous sound—a clacking that had gotten louder in the past year. If Elizabeth had been trying to sell their own house, she'd have suggested they get it looked at by her garage door guy. But Tony was content to let it clack and clamor.

Like their marriage.

"I just heard him pull in, Danielle."

"Will he be mad about my C?" Danielle said. The look in her eyes made Elizabeth wonder. She wanted to march out to the garage and tell Tony to affirm their daughter, say something positive, look at how full the glass was and not see the one little thing that was less than perfect.

"I already told you, baby. Getting a C is not that bad. It's okay."

She said it to convince not just Danielle, but also herself. Because she knew her husband wouldn't feel the same.



Clara was in her war room, as she called it, when she got the distinct impression that her life was about to change. It was a

sense that she was about to do something drastic, but she had no clue what it was or why she should do it. Skydiving? She chuckled. At her age the ground was already too far away. Find some homeless woman down on the corner by the grocery and give her a sandwich? She had done that the day before.

Clara knew that prayer could easily become a list of things for God to do. Just run through the gamut of wants, needs, or things hoped for and put an *amen* at the end. Any way you sliced it, she thought, it was selfish. At the core of every human heart was someone who wanted to please herself, she believed, and that truth fought against the power of prayer.

Prayer, at its most basic level, was surrender. Like Jesus in the garden, saying, "Not My will, but Yours, be done." The ironic thing was, when a person surrendered their will, they got God's, and then they received what they were really looking for all along. This was what she believed.

Earlier in her life, she had looked at prayer as talking to God and telling Him things. It was like crawling up in the lap of a daddy and explaining your aches and pains and disappointments. But after a while, she discovered the listening part of prayer, the allowing of God's Holy Spirit to move and help her recall things and desire things she hadn't requested.

In her war room, the little closet on the second floor of her home, something began to stir. There was no audible voice, no mysterious letters sticking out at her from the word jumble in the morning paper. It was simply a sense that God was moving, pushing her from her comfort zone. She had no idea what that meant, and the more she prayed and asked God what the feeling was, the more quiet the Almighty seemed to get.

"Whatever You want to do, Lord, I'm willing to go with You. Just lead the way."

And then she waited.



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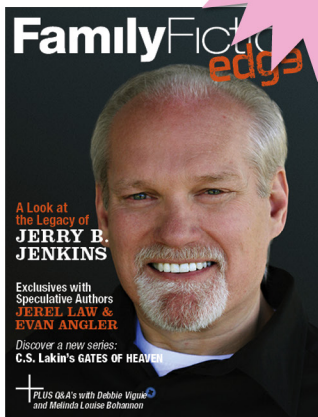
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