



A Tide Worth Turning

A NOVELLA

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another great hit!"

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BETH WISEMAN

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ADDISON PACED ACROSS HER MOTHER'S LIVING ROOM as sweat dampened her temples and the base of her neck. May was already punishing them with Texas temperatures that were usually reserved for July and August. But Lee Ann Burke had a steadfast rule not to run the air conditioning until July. If there was any saving grace at all, it was the ocean pushing a breeze ashore, which wafted through the screened windows of the house Addison had grown up in. She breathed in the briny aroma, a smell she'd haul to her grave someday, with enough good and bad memories to keep her balanced on the plank she'd been walking since her father died.

She glanced at her smartphone, wondering if she was going to make it to her next appointment on time. The continuous drip of the kitchen faucet around the corner felt like water torture against her left temple. She rubbed the source of the irritation. "Mom, are you sure the agency said three o'clock? It's almost three thirty."

"That's what they said." Her mother didn't glance up, but kept focused on the jigsaw puzzle she was hunched over. Addison couldn't recall a time that her family—small as it was—had ever shared a meal at the dining table, except maybe Christmas and Thanksgiving. On most days, her mother had one of her puzzles spread atop the oak table, with a sweating glass of sweet tea nearby and an ashtray. There was still sweet tea within reach, but at least Mom had taken to smoking her cigarettes outside a few years ago, something she should have done when it became common knowledge that secondhand smoke was unhealthy. Addison recalled all the smoke she and her father had inhaled over the years,

wondering if that might have contributed to her father's cancer diagnosis. Addison could still smell the stench of tobacco in the house. In light of recent events, she wondered if her mother would quit smoking. *Doubtful*. If she didn't quit after they found out Dad had cancer, Addison doubted she'd do it now.

Addison glanced at the TV trays in the stand next to the couch, the rust barely visible amidst the flowery design that vined up the legs and covered the tops. She couldn't help but smile. Some of her happiest moments were in this living room eating on TV trays and watching "Everyone Loves Raymond." Her father had loved that show, and sometimes Addison could almost hear her father's laughter late at night, right before she drifted off to sleep. Maybe he was sending her a message that she'd laugh again one day too.

Sighing, she walked to the window to get the full effect of the breeze, and after another twenty minutes of pacing the living room, she was glad to see a car turning in the driveway. "Mom, the caregiver from the agency is here." She turned to face her mother, who still didn't look up. "Mom, did you hear me?"

Slowly, her mother pulled her eyes up until they were locked with Addison's. "I had a stroke, Addie, I'm not deaf." Scowling, she looked back at her puzzle, then mumbled, "And I don't need a babysitter."

Addison shook her head, feeling a trickle of perspiration roll down her face. They'd had this conversation a dozen times, at least. "I know you don't need a babysitter, and this woman isn't being hired for that. She's just here for a few weeks, to make sure you don't fall again and to help around the house. Just until you get your strength back."

When her mother didn't respond, Addison wound around the coffee table and moved toward the front door, surprised to see a man standing on the other side of the screen. "Can I help you?"

"G'day. I'm Logan Northrup. The agency sent me to . . ." He unfolded a piece of paper, scanned it, then looked at Addison. "This is 222 Beachfront Drive, right? I'm here to take care of Lee Ann Burke."

It took Addison a few seconds to realize he'd said "good day." It sounded like "goodie." Addison didn't say anything for a few moments, even though she heard a slight chuckle from her mother. "Uh . . . I guess I just assumed they were sending a woman."

Mom cleared her throat. "To assume is to make an—"

"Mother!" Addison peered over her shoulder. "Stop." Mom shrugged, and Addison turned back to the tall man still on the other side of the door. She eased the door open and stepped aside. "Sorry it's so hot in here."

"No problem." He smiled, and Addison tried to identify his accent, which

made him even better looking than he already was. Wavy blond hair, parted in the middle, hung to the collar of his white golf shirt, which sported an emblem with the agency's logo. Logan looked more like a lifeguard than a caregiver, she thought as she eyed his chiseled arms, golden tan, and eyes as deep blue as the ocean. Her eyes cut to his left hand. No ring. There was a time in her life when Addison would have latched on to such beauty. But usually, when a single man pushing thirty looks this good, there is something wrong with him. A truckload of baggage, perhaps. Maybe a criminal record, although doubtful since he was hired out by an agency. Maybe he just wasn't a nice person. *Or gay.*

She motioned toward her mother at the table. "This is my mother, Lee Ann Burke." She paused. "Mom, this is Logan from the agency."

"Nice to meet you, Mrs. Burke."

Addison's mother finished fitting a piece of the puzzle, then stood up, and hobbled toward Addison and Logan on shaky legs, stopping a few feet short of Logan. "Addie believes that I have one foot in the grave, but not only am I not planning to check out just yet, but I'm also not old enough to be called Mrs. Burke. Please just call me Lee Ann." Mom extended her hand to Logan, and while Addison cringed at her mother's idea of an introduction, it could have gone much worse.

"Then Lee Ann it is." He smiled again, flashing a set of pearly whites, then offered Addison the file folder he was holding. "This details my credentials, and there is also a list of duties that the agency gave me, if you'd like to look over it to make sure there isn't something else you'd like me to do during my time here."

Addison looked over the paperwork. He'd been a caregiver for almost two years. Not much experience, but then Addison's mother wasn't going to require much. Logan would be more of a babysitter, as Mom had said. Addison was worried her mother's mind had suffered, and the doctor said her likelihood of having another stroke was highest over the next couple of months. Even before the stroke, Mom often forgot to take her blood pressure meds.

"It says under the list of duties that you'll be here from ten in the morning until three in the afternoon, and that's fine. But it also says that you'll prepare a home-cooked meal each day for Mom's lunch." Addison glanced up at him. "She's shaky on her legs from a recent fall, but she can make her own lunch, a sandwich or something."

Smiling again, he said, "I'm a chef, so I just offered that on my own."

Addison chewed on her bottom lip in an effort not to propose to the guy here and now. *Baggage or not.*

"Hello, I'm right here," her mother interjected. "Had a stroke. Not

deaf, remember?” She cleared her throat, raising her chin a bit. Mom was an attractive woman who didn’t look her sixty-two years, which was surprising considering the smoking, lack of exercise, and two stiff whiskey sours each night. Addison held her breath as she waited for her mother to go on. “Logan, I think it would be lovely if you prepared us lunch every day, and I’d be happy to pay for anything you need in the way of groceries to do so.” Mom moved slowly toward the front door, looking over her shoulder once. “You kids work out the details while I have a smoke. But I wouldn’t be opposed to a sponge bath, if you’d like to put that on the agenda.” She giggled as the screen slammed behind her.

Addison hung her head for a few moments before she looked back up at Logan and sighed. “She’s my mother. And I love her. But she’s opposed to having a babysitter, as she calls it. So, I hope she doesn’t give you a hard time.”

“I’m sure it will be fine.” He wasn’t smiling anymore, and Addison wondered if he was already planning to request a transfer from the agency.

Drip, drip, drip. She tried to ignore the sound of the faucet, the headache still pounding against her temple as she dug into her purse, pulling out a business card. “This is my cell number if you need me for anything. I suspect that if you just ignore most of what she says, this should be a pretty easy gig.” Addison grinned. “And she is quite capable of taking a bath on her own.”

“I’m sure it will all be good. God plans the trip. I’m just the driver.”

There ya go! Addison knew there had to be something wrong with this Adonis of a man. *He’s a Holy Roller.*

And she didn’t have room for God in her life these days. She’d trusted Him one too many times before.

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