

Sorrowed Souls

By

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For

Mary Castellanos

Brother Bob Theis, MC

Brother Ben Harrison, MC

Introduction

The concept for this book sprang from a statistic I ran across while doing research for a previous novel. Discovering that eighty five percent of the homeless had been abused as children astonished me. It seemed the perfect subject for my fourth novel; but then the economic crash of 2008 shook the world and the face of poverty was front page news. Neighbors, friends and even family members were losing their jobs, walking the unemployment lines and having to share housing just to keep their children fed. Those of us who were fortunate enough to keep our jobs were really only one paycheck away from the streets.

Rather than continue with the outline I had already drawn up; I did what any good writer would do, I kept the opening sentence and the closing sentence, and threw out everything in the middle and started looking for a new path. This book would not have been possible without some extraordinary people; the kind of people that remain invisible to ninety eight percent of society.

The Missionaries of Charity is an organization devoted to serving the poorest of the poor. I have had the extreme honor of being welcomed within their walls to assist in a portion of their work. All of this has been made possible by a woman whom I have grown to admire and love deeply, Mary Castellanos. Through her I have had the pleasure of working with Brother Bob Theis, MC, and Brother Ben Harrison, MC.

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They allowed my presence without questioning either my motives or my beliefs, and for that I am grateful.

It is difficult to put into words the humility that overcomes you when someone who has nothing is willing to accept you into their home, especially when their home is a cardboard box. Even harder to explain is how it feels when you visibly see a person light up when you appear; knowing they've been waiting for your arrival, just to give you a hug, or say 'hello'. The world of the homeless, or the street people, is a different layer of society that many would like to pretend does not exist; but it is very real and very close and very human.

My heartfelt thanks go out to all those who have allowed me to share their piece of the world, but especially to LaShawn, Peewee and Pepper. You have shown me that home really is where your heart is, and that is so much more than just a saying.

Prologue

The sun set on another day as Bryan Tines worked tirelessly in his austere high-rise. He'd been there since before the sun came up, working the phones. That was his forte; he was a master on the phones. He could persuade a bank to extend a loan, a contractor to get the job done a week ahead of schedule, a designer to give that extra touch needed to make the building a step above, and keep his vendors at bay.

Bryan was the lord of his domain. Six months shy of forty, three quarters of an inch beneath six feet, two pounds less than two hundred, with a full head of hair, and dazzling blue eyes that pierced right to your soul, he always had a five o'clock shadow. His nearly perfect smile disarmed even his worst enemy, the only flaw a slight chip in his upper left lateral tooth that could only be seen up close. He ran a successful real estate development firm in Southern California, with twenty-five employees counting on him for their daily bread. He'd built the kingdom through hard work and long hours, stomping out the competition, making enemies along the way.

Amber, Bryan's wife of twelve years, waited patiently for Bryan to stop working so hard, so long, and so ferociously. He barely slowed down for the birth of their two children, Skye and Taylor, now nine and six. Although Bryan claimed, "They are the center of my universe!" his world never slowed enough for that to be true. When he finally left his office, that

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crisp February night, he had a nagging feeling he had left something undone, but he couldn't quite put his finger on it.

One

The crushed-gravel drive had been the latest trend when the four-thousand-square-foot home had been built at the end of the cul-de-sac. It had been a second-anniversary present to Amber. Bryan spent so little time there that it became more of a chore to pull the Bentley into the driveway. It was past midnight when he slipped his key into the wrought-iron, hand-carved door that opened into the high-ceilinged foyer.

Amber had left one light on at the end of the hall. Bryan slipped in quietly and immediately remembered what he had forgotten. *How could I be so stupid!* he thought as he open-palmed his hand to his forehead. *Of course! Today's our twelfth anniversary, and I promised Amber I'd be home in time to take her for a romantic dinner—just the two of us. She even reminded me this morning. "Honey, you won't forget, will you? I've already lined up the babysitter." "I won't forget! I promise." That's what I told her, and once again, I broke my word.*

He walked slowly into the sunken living room and dropped into the over-stuffed chair. He leaned back and slipped his shoes off and began to wiggle his toes. All the while, his mind was racing. *How am I going to make this up to her? She's always telling me that I put work before her and the kids, and I tell her that is ridiculous, but that is exactly what happened today. First thing tomorrow morning, I'm hiring a new assist-*

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ant, and their job is going to make sure that I put my family first!

Bryan was so pleased with himself he put his head back and instantly fell asleep.

Sunrise coming in the living room windows woke him up. The Tines home not only rested at the end of a cul-de-sac but also sat atop a hill, and the living room had one uncurtained, full wall of glass, to allow for an unobstructed view of the valley around them.

Not wanting to wake Amber up before she had to take the kids to school, he quietly showered and changed in his private bathroom. It was separate from the master bedroom. The décor was in deep shades of brown, with an oversized shower, made of one continuous slab of marble, flown in special from Italy. The countertop and sink were of the same marble, and the bathroom had no tub. On the wall were towel bars large enough to hold three large bath sheets, and there was a place for Bryan to hang his oversized robe.

Before leaving for the office, he placed a note in a conspicuous place on the kitchen table, “Honey, Skye, and Taylor, I love you all so much. You will see that I am going to change everything. I *will* be home for dinner. Hugs and Kisses.”

Bryan drove to work with renewed enthusiasm, and as soon as his assistant Scarlett arrived, he began barking orders. “Scarlett!”

“Yes, sir?” she sheepishly responded.

“I want you to find me a new assistant!”

Scarlett Milton, a beautiful woman, who was immensely shy, did as she was asked, but never started a conversation. She was perfect for Bryan Tines, because she never questioned him. She had been his assistant for eight years, and had put up with more things than most assistants would have. Her brown eyes, brown hair, and five-three, petite build allowed her to blend in with every crowd. Bryan used her to spy on his enemies. “Did I do something wrong, sir?”

“No, of course not, I need another assistant.”

“Oh, of course, right away, sir.”

By three o'clock, the new assistant had been hired, and Bryan told her the only thing she was to do was make sure he never missed another personal commitment again.

On Tuesday, February 3, Bryan Tines left his office at 4:00 pm, something he had never done in all the years he had been in business. This was the day he was putting his family before his business.

Pulling into the crushed-gravel driveway, Bryan's heart was doing somersaults; he was so excited. He practically leapt out of the car and ran into the house. “Amber! I'm home.”

He was greeted by silence.

“Skye? Taylor? Anybody home? I'm here, just like I said I would be.”

Silence.

“Anyone?”

Bryan walked into the kitchen and saw his note sitting in the same place he had left it that morning. “That's odd,” he said out loud.

He continued to move through the house, first into the family room. Everything seemed to be in order. Then he went into Skye's room. The bed was made, everything was put away, and nothing seemed wrong. He went into Taylor's room, and the same thing was true there. Then he went into the master suite.

That's when he saw them. He took one look, fell to his knees, and started to scream.

Scarlett arrived in the office Wednesday morning at her usual time, but her boss was not there; that was unusual. In fact, that had never happened before. Unsure what to do, she did nothing. When Bryan still had not shown up by the end of the day, and she had made numerous excuses for him, she sensed something was wrong, but had done absolutely nothing about it.

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Scarlett was in awe of Bryan Tines. In the eight years she had worked for him, she had never gotten over her initial reaction. She knew more about him than he would ever know, and she kept that knowledge secret, waiting to use it when it became necessary. Her admiration of Bryan Tines did not outweigh her disdain for him; she had seen him literally bring successful businessmen crawling to him for forgiveness. Bryan could be ruthless, cunning, and downright evil. Scarlett never wanted that wrath unleashed toward her.

On Wednesday, February 4, Scarlett Milton made a point not to tell anyone that her boss had not come to work. She made up excuses for him, cancelled appointments, and covered for him; while deep inside, she feared something was wrong. She only hoped that he would be there Thursday morning, and she could breathe easier.

Detective Kyle Adams arrived at Bryan's office at ten thirty on Thursday morning. "Ms. Milton?" the detective asked. He was a sharp dresser, wearing an overcoat of dark gray that offset the gray specks at his temples. His brown eyes had a twinkle in them and managed to put Scarlett at ease immediately.

"Yes," she barely managed to whisper.

"You're Mr. Tines' executive assistant, right?"

"I guess you could call me that." She chuckled.

"Is he in today?"

"I haven't seen him today."

"Is that usual, ma'am?" Kyle asked, placing himself on the edge of her desk.

Scarlett looked up at him and wondered how honest she should be. "Umm, no, not really."

"Not really? Or no?"

"No," Scarlett said, on the brink of tears.

Kyle noticed and immediately backed off. "Is it okay if I call you Scarlett, ma'am?"

"Yes, I suppose so," she answered, barely audibly.

“Were you named after Scarlett O’Hara?” Kyle asked, shyly, as if it was a secret.

Scarlett’s eyes lit up, and she answered, “Yes, my mother was raised in Georgia and always wished she’d been raised on a plantation, so I guess she did the next best thing by giving me that name.”

“Well, it suits you, ma’am.”

“Thank you,” she responded, blushing.

“Now, can you tell me what your boss’s daily routine usually is?”

“Actually, up until two days ago, he was always here before me in the morning, so I’m not really sure what time he’d get here,” she blurted out, before realizing what she had said.

“So, he didn’t come to work yesterday, either?”

Scarlett gave Kyle a guilty look and asked, “Was I not supposed to tell you that?”

“Scarlett, we’re trying to find your boss, so I need you to tell me anything you can. Okay?”

“Okay,” she answered.

“When was the last time you actually saw Mr. Tines?”

“Four o’clock, Tuesday night.”

“Are you sure?”

“Positive,” she answered, nodding. “That was the first time since I started here that he had ever left the office before I did. Usually, Mr. Tines was the first person in the office and the last person out of the office. It was a well-known fact around here that no one could ever beat him to work and no one would ever leave after him.”

“Why was that?” Kyle asked, wrinkling his eyebrows together.

Scarlett put her elbow on her desk and rested her chin on her hand and thought about the question for a minute before answering. “Well, I can only tell you the things that I’ve heard.”

“That’s better than nothing,” Kyle said. “Fire away, I’m all ears.”

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“I’ve heard that he worked so hard because he built this business from the ground up and he didn’t trust anyone else to do it better than him.”

“That makes sense,” Kyle said, nodding his head.

“I’ve also heard that his father told Bryan as he was growing up that he would never amount to anything, and that is why he works so hard. He needs to prove his father wrong.”

“That also makes sense,” Kyle said.

“The other one that I’ve heard is that he’s so far in debt that he has to work hard just to pay his bills.”

“That one might be true, too,” Kyle said. “I guess we’ll have to find out which one, or if all of them are true. Why do you think he worked so hard?”

Scarlett looked at Kyle and asked, “Can I be perfectly honest with you?”

“Of course you can, ma’am.”

“I don’t think Bryan Tines is a very happy man, and the only thing that gives him any joy or satisfaction is making other people unhappy. He had to be here to do that. I think that is why he worked so hard.”

“Where do you think he went?”

“Honestly, Detective Adams, I don’t have any idea,” she said, looking straight at him. “But I really hope you find him.”

“Ma’am, you really care for your boss, don’t you?”

She looked down at her hands, wrung them together in her lap, and replied, “He works hard at being not a very nice man, sir. But I don’t really think that’s who he is.”