

Restored Hope

Brenda Youngerman



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Private Scars (2006)

For my mom . . .
for enabling me to have a second chance
and all the mothers who worry every day about their children.
Sometimes we just have to believe that all things
happen for a reason.

❖
ONE

SAMUEL AND CAMILLA were born two minutes and three seconds apart. Peter and Tara Miller welcomed their new bundles of joy with open hearts and widespread arms. “They’re beautiful,” the nurses all said, as they peered at the babies in the nursery.

“Look identical, not fraternal,” Lacey Henry, the head nurse, declared. She’d seen her share of newborns. “These two are going to turn some heads, mark my words. Just look at those eyelashes, and the perfect curve on the nose. It’s hard to tell that one’s a boy and one’s a girl.”

“Are these their first?” someone asked.

“No, I heard they have an older son, about five,” Lacey responded. She felt it was her duty to know everything about everyone. She’d been there for twenty-five years, seen more nurses come and go than she could keep track of. Still, she had the charm to make new mothers feel at ease. It must be that soft, curly head of hair, the sweet, pleasant smile, and her spongy middle. She looked like everyone’s favorite grandmother. “But these two sure are beauties. Mark my words; they’re going to go far with those looks.”

Peter, Tara, and Jason Miller lived in a cookie-cutter house placed in the middle of a tract of homes in a fairly large subdivision of Vista Oaks. Subdivisions built during that time had three plans: two-bedroom one bath, three-bedroom one bath, and the deluxe model

of three-bedroom and two baths. To people driving down Pixie Lane, the floor plan was not identifiable. All the houses on the street appeared, from the outside, to be the same. The only difference was their placement on the lot. You drove either to the left or right to get into the garage, and then the living room was on the adjacent side of the house. The remaining living space, regardless of the floor plan, was placed behind the living room and garage.

Vista Oaks advertised this subdivision as the most glamorous part of the world and called it "Vista de Oaks." Every lot boasted at least one oak tree in the front, and if the owners were lucky, they had one in the backyard, as well. Over the years, inhabitants of the houses had made improvements, either to the building itself or to the landscape. The Miller house, when they purchased it, had not been altered from its original form. That was part of its appeal.

Now, more than fifty years later, those trees that hadn't been cut down were uprooting the houses and destroying the plumbing. Original standard home colors were beige with dark beige trim or dark beige with light beige trim. These colors had altered greatly over the years, as well, and Pixie Lane boasted a cornucopia of colors.

"Peter, look at that oak in the front. Our kids can climb the tree when they get old enough," Tara commented the first time they drove up.

"Honey, we don't even have kids." he laughed. "Don't you think we should look inside the house before you decide this is the one you want?"

As they walked through the house, Tara pointed at what she liked. "Peter, we can make this into a nursery. See how the sun comes in here?"

Cindy, their realtor, spoke up. "As you can tell, this house sits on a south-facing lot, so the window in this room will pick up the

afternoon sun, where the kitchen will catch the morning sun.” Cindy Reynolds had been a realtor for nearly ten years and learned early on that inserting herself in the clients’ conversation usually sold the house. Her narrow frame, long blonde hair, sunny disposition, and broad smile made most clients instantly comfortable with her. This was her last showing of the day, and instinct told her that Tara loved it as soon as she walked up the front steps.

“So we could actually watch the sunrise from our kitchen?” Peter joked.

“I’m not sure about that, but it is an eastern-facing view,” she responded. “I heard Tara mention kids. Are you expecting?”

Tara beamed as she answered, “Yes, I’m four months pregnant.”

As they sat discussing the offer, Peter was a bit concerned about the size of the house. “I’m not sure about three bedrooms and only one bathroom. I think we might be asking for trouble down the line.”

“Honey,” Tara squeezed his hand across the table, “everything else we’ve looked at in this price range only has two bedrooms. I’d much rather have three bedrooms than two bathrooms.”

Peter started to chuckle. “Is that pregnancy logic?” he asked his wife of three years. They’d known each other since grade school but had not really been friends then. It wasn’t until after college that they ran into each other again and started dating. Peter was a sales executive for a pharmaceutical company, and Tara was an assistant manager at the local bank.

“No, Peter,” Tara’s eyes began to fill with tears, “that’s not pregnancy logic. That’s real logic.”

Peter realized he’d touched a raw nerve and began to backpedal. “Tara, I didn’t mean it that way. Honey, of course this house is the best house we’ve seen for the money. I’m just concerned that we might need more than one bathroom; that’s all.”

Swatting away her tears, she asked, "Can't we add one later?"

"Do you like this house *that* much?" Peter asked.

Tara looked at him and said, "There's something about it that feels like home, like we *belong* here."

Turning toward Cindy, who silently witnessed this discussion, Peter wrote down their final offer. "Take this to the owner, and let them know we are not moving off this number. We can't afford anything higher. My wife's in love with the house, but we're expecting our first child and that's all we can do."

When Tara and Peter pulled into the driveway of that same house six years later with newborn twins, the appearance of the front yard had dramatically changed. Tara had always dreamed of a house with a white picket fence, and Peter had built one for her.

"You know," she said as they drove up, "I'll always love the fact that we're the only house on this street with a white picket fence. It makes our house special."

"I'm pretty sure there's more than the white picket fence that makes this house special," he said, as he came around to help her out of the car. "Let's get you out of the car first, and then we can introduce Jason to his new brother and sister."

"Take 'em back. We don't need them!" Jason screamed at his father. "Why can't it be the way it's always been?" Jason started hitting his father.

Peter grabbed both of his son's fists and calmly answered, "Jason, we talked about this, remember? Mommy's tummy was big, and we talked about what was happening. You, me, and Mommy sat right here on this couch." He patted the couch in the living room.

Tara and Peter had introduced Jason to Samuel and Camilla a few minutes earlier. They had placed the babies' car seats on that very same couch, and Jason had looked at both of them with disgust.

He tried to pull their seats off the couch and throw them on the floor. Tara quickly grabbed their seats and took them into the third bedroom, where their cribs were waiting. The same room just six weeks before had been an office/storage room.

Peter continued talking to his oldest son. "Jason, you even helped us decorate the new room and move in the two cribs."

"Yeah," he lunged toward Peter with his fists, "but that wasn't supposed to be for babies!"

"It wasn't?" Peter asked. "What did you think was growing in Mommy's tummy?"

"You said I was getting a new brother and sister; I thought they'd be just like me. Eddie Loomis has a baby in his house, and it cries all the time."

"Well, maybe we'll get lucky, and Camilla and Samuel won't cry that much."

Jason's blue eyes overflowed with tears as he looked up at his father and quietly begged, "Daddy, can't we send them back?"