

RHODE ISLAND
Weddings

Heartache Matures into Lasting Love
within Three Romantic Stories

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BARBOUR
PUBLISHING

Down from the Cross © 2005 by Joyce Livingston
Mother's Day © 2005 by Joyce Livingston
The Fourth of July © 2005 by Joyce Livingston

ISBN 978-1-59789-842-3

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Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

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Published by Barbour Publishing, Inc., P.O. Box 719, Uhrichsville, Ohio 44683,
www.barbourbooks.com

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Printed in the United States of America.

Chapter 1

Keene Moray loved Providence, Rhode Island. If he could choose one place in the lower forty-eight to live on a permanent basis, it would be Providence, right in the heart of the New England area. Unfortunately, his profession required him to live elsewhere—in New York City—but not by choice. It wasn't that he didn't love the Big Apple. He did. But it had become too crowded, too demanding, and far too busy for his liking.

"This is the city for me," he said aloud, flipping on his turn signal as he drove his new BMW convertible down Francis Street toward the convention center. "With its relaxed, laid-back atmosphere. Someday I'm going to have myself a house in this city. Maybe a lovely old brick mansion."

He sped up and then reached to insert a new CD into the player in the dash. It slipped from his fingers and fell onto the thickly carpeted floor. With a quick glance to check the traffic ahead of him, he bent to retrieve the elusive CD.

Suddenly his body lunged forward, only to be yanked back by the seat belt, the noise of crashing metal deafening his ears. The car's air bag pinned him against the seat back, and his head slammed into the headrest. The BMW filled with a misty gray haze from the air bag's powdery substance. Although the bag deflated instantly, Keene found it difficult to breathe. He instinctively yanked the buckle open on his seat belt, found the car door handle, and pushed open the door, staggering out in search of fresh air to fill his lungs.

That's when he fully realized what had happened.



"Ughh!" Jane Delaney leaned her forehead against the steering wheel, her heart pounding erratically. *What happened? Why is that horn honking?* With trembling fingers, she reached for the knot forming on her forehead. "My car!" She pushed away and struggled to open the door, but the handle wouldn't budge. "Oh, dear Lord, I've been in an accident. Please, God, don't let my car be ruined!"

Though it hurt to move, she forced herself over the console and passenger seat, wincing at the stabbing pain in her left leg. She pushed her way out the door, nearly falling when she tried to stand to her feet. With the bright morning sun blinding her, she hobbled around the front of her car, placing her palms on the hood for support. She felt faint, light-headed, and woozy, and it scared her. She'd never felt this way before. However, her fright didn't compare with the feelings

of helplessness and exasperation she experienced when she caught sight of the driver's side of her car. She stood staring, gaping at the damage, everything going in and out of focus.

A hand gripped her arm. "Are you all right? I am so sorry! I must've run a red light!" The man let his hold on her relax long enough to pull his cell phone from his belt. "I've got to call 911! You need an ambulance!"



Keene grabbed for the woman, nearly dropping his phone, but despite his efforts she fell into a heap at his feet. "What have I done?" he shouted, quickly kneeling beside her and punching 911 into his phone. The dispatcher answered immediately.

"Help, someone, help! I've just run into a woman's car, and I think she's unconscious!"

"Give me your location, sir, and we'll have someone right there," the dispatcher answered calmly with an authority that did nothing to calm Keene's frazzled nerves.

He looked around quickly, hoping to find a street sign or some other indication of his location. "I'm . . . I'm on Francis Street."

"Where on Francis Street, sir? Can you give me the name of a nearby cross street, maybe a familiar landmark?"

His mind raced. "I—I don't know. . . I was on Francis Street heading toward the convention center. . ." He paused, trying to remember what happened.

Several people were gathering now, one man bending over the young woman with great concern. Keene leaned toward him, his own breath coming in short gasps. "Where am I?"

Apparently familiar with the area, the man looked up and said, "Francis Street and Sabin."

"Francis Street and Sabin," Keene barked into the phone, relieved to be able to relay accurate information.

"Thank you, sir. They'll find you."

"Tell them to hurry, please. I don't know how badly she is hurt, but her head is bleeding. How could I have done this?"

"Ugghh."

Keene turned quickly at the sound. At least the woman was alive. He pulled a freshly ironed handkerchief from his pocket and pressed it to her forehead. If only he could stop the bleeding. "Hang on, lady. Help is coming. Someone should be here any minute." Blinking hard, he covered his face with his free hand. *How could this have happened? One minute I was driving along, putting a CD—the CD! It dropped onto the floor, and I reached for it! I didn't even see the woman's car!*

He scanned Francis Street in both directions for any sign of the emergency

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vehicle, his frantic gaze locking on the stoplight. *A stoplight! I ran a stoplight! I could have killed that woman!*

The wail of a siren brought him to his feet. Keene moved quickly out of the way yet stayed close enough to see and hear the things going on as an ambulance pulled up beside him, followed by a police car, then a fire engine.

“Can you tell me what happened, sir?” Clipboard in hand, the police officer hurriedly exited his car and began making notations.

“It was my fault!” Keene gestured toward the stoplight. “I—I didn’t see the stoplight.”

Poising his ballpoint pen over the clipboard, the officer took on a dubious expression. “I’ll need your full name and address.”

“My. . .my name is Keene Moray. M-O-R-A-Y. I’m staying at. . .at. . .” His mind went blank. “I’m staying at. . .at—oh, what is the name of that place?”

He described the complex where the condominium he had rented for the next few months was located, and fortunately, the officer recognized it by its description and came up with the name, Kennewick Place.

Keene nodded. “Do you think she’s going to be all right?” He craned his neck over the crowd that had assembled, trying to get a glimpse of the woman when the EMTs lifted her onto the gurney.

The officer turned, looked briefly in her direction, and then continued writing. “Don’t know. Sometimes these intersection collisions can do more serious damage to the drivers than to the cars.” The officer stopped writing, his slight frown converting to one of understanding. “Hang on a minute, and I’ll see what I can find out.”

Keene watched as the man strode over to one of the EMTs, conversed with him for a second, jotted down a few notes, then walked back. The two stood watching the men loading the gurney into the waiting ambulance. Then the doors closed, and it headed back down the street, lights flashing.

“He said it didn’t look like her injuries were life-threatening,” the officer told him. “She probably fainted from the trauma of the accident and the loss of blood. That happens sometimes, especially if it’s the person’s first accident. However, they were concerned about her left ankle. They’re taking her to the hospital to make sure she’s all right and there are no internal injuries. Standard procedure for this type of thing.” He let loose a slight chuckle. “Guess she gave them quite a battle. She didn’t want to go to the hospital, kept saying she didn’t have insurance and couldn’t afford it.”

Keene stared at the twisted wreckage of the woman’s little economy car, then at his solid BMW. While her car looked to be a total loss, his had sustained only minor damage to the hood, bumper, and lights, and he felt terrible. “I’ll pay for her hospital bill, and of course, I’ll have her car repaired or replaced. It was my fault.”

The officer peered over his sunglasses with a hint of a cautioning smile. “Don’t think your lawyer would be happy hearing you say that. I’m going to have to give you a citation for running that red light, you know.”

“Did you get her name?” The least of Keene’s worries right now was the cost of the ticket he would have to pay. Without a doubt, he was the one who had caused the accident, and he would be more than willing to answer for his carelessness and irresponsibility. That poor woman! He could have killed her.

“Oh, yeah,” the officer said, looking up from his book. “I got it. It’s Jane Delaney.”



Jane winced and sighed in frustration. She had been in a hospital a number of times, but she had never been a patient.

“Well, how are we feeling?” A big-boned woman in a heavily starched nurse’s uniform came bustling into the cubicle. “You were pretty upset when they brought you in. You’re looking a little better now.”

How are we feeling? Jane wanted to smile at the woman’s question, but her sore face would not allow it. Even the slightest movement hurt. Besides, she had more important things on her mind. Like how would she ever pay for all of this? She had not been able to make a car or insurance payment in over three months. A letter from the insurance company was sitting on her dresser right now, saying they had already canceled her. And what could she use for transportation now that one whole side of her car had caved in?

The nurse bent over her, tugging the cover up beneath her chin. “Are you hungry? It’s nearly noon. I think I can get you a lunch tray. Yummy, yummy! Chicken noodle soup, celery sticks, cherry Jell-O, and chocolate pudding!”

“No, thank you. My . . . my stomach doesn’t feel like food right now.” Jane struggled to get comfortable on the narrow bed but winced when a sharp pain in her injured leg prevented it. “Ouch!”

“Oh, are we hurting?” The woman bustled around the bed, filling the water glass and straightening the side table.

I don’t know about you, but I am! “A little, I guess. I’ve got to get out of here.”

The woman gave her a pleasant smile. “You’re not going anywhere until the doctor says you can. How’s the head doing?” She bent to look more closely at the wound. “Umm, they did a good job putting those sutures in. Shouldn’t leave too much of a scar. You’re lucky that cut is in your hairline.”

Jane’s free hand went to her head. “I’m . . . I’m kind of light-headed. Dizzy. You know what I mean?”

The woman nodded. “I’m not surprised with a knot like that. I’m amazed you don’t have an unbearable headache.” She quit her fussing and gave Jane a sudden frown. “You don’t, do you?”

“Not really. It’s not too bad. It’s my leg that hurts.” She scooted to the edge of the bed and slowly hung her legs over the side. “I—I have to go to the restroom.”

“I brought you a walker. Do you think you can hobble to the bathroom by holding on to it?” The nurse took a firm grasp on her arm and tugged her forward. “By the way, my name’s Mildred.”

Warily, Jane slid one foot to the floor, placing a hand on the mattress to brace herself.

“Whoa, take your time, and let me keep a hold on you. I don’t want you falling.” The nurse grabbed on to the walker’s handle grips. “Steady there. Get your bearings before you try to take any steps.”

“Are you sure she should be out of bed?” an anxious-sounding male voice asked from the doorway.

Jane spun around, realizing too late she had moved more quickly than she should. She all but fell back into Mildred’s arms.

The man rushed toward them, but Mildred shooed him off. “I’ve got her. She’s fine.” She helped Jane lower herself back onto the bed.

Jane clutched at the front of her hospital gown and scooted her hips back onto the mattress.

The man turned his head away, apparently realizing for the first time that he had invaded her privacy. “I’m. . . I’m so sorry,” he stammered, looking every direction but at the two women. “It’s just that I’ve been so worried about you. It seemed no one would tell me anything about your condition.”

Jane eyed him inquisitively as she lay back down. He was a handsome man, maybe ten years older than she, with dark, closely cropped hair, big brown eyes, and dark lashes. “Are. . . are you sure you’re in the right place?”

“Oh, I’d recognize you anywhere.”

His quick answer mystified her, yet after taking a second glance at him, she realized he did look vaguely familiar. Her mind raced to pull up his identity from the depths of her brain’s database.

He hurried to the side of the bed, hovering over her like an overattentive mother. “I’m. . . I’m the one who put you here.”

She instinctively pushed back into the pillow. “You work for the hospital? I’m sorry. I don’t have insurance and I—”

He shook his head vehemently. “Oh, no. You have it all wrong. I—I ran the stoplight. I didn’t mean to, really I didn’t. I didn’t see it. The sun. . . my car. . . the CD on the floor. . .”

What is he saying? Her muddled mind registered a big fat zero. His words made no sense at all.

“I didn’t see you,” he said, peeking around the nurse, “then suddenly I hit your car! I was so afraid. I mean. . . you were bleeding. . . I called 911. . . the officer

wanted my address and I couldn't remember it."

Mildred took over. "Slow down, Mister. I don't even have a knot on my head, and I have no idea what you're talking about. From the confused look on my patient's face, I'm sure she doesn't either." She sent a quick glance toward Jane.

He reached forward and grabbed on to Jane's arm. "Please, hear me out. I'm sorry for being so incoherent, but. . .but I've never injured anyone before."

Jane felt herself staring at the man as jagged pieces of her memory processed his words. "You're the one who hit me?"

He lowered his head and gnawed on his lower lip. "Yes, but I intend to make things right with you. After all, it was my fault! I'd. . .I'd like to talk to you, if you feel up to it."

Mildred rolled her eyes and shook her head as she drew a chair up close to the bed and motioned him toward it. Then, wagging her finger in his face, she said, "I don't want you upsetting her, you hear? I'll be right here watching you."

He seemed relieved and moved into the chair. "Let me start at the beginning."

Jane looked from the stranger to Mildred and back to the stranger again. "I'm listening."

"I don't live in Providence," he began. "I live in New York City, but I'm making my residence here for the next few months." Seeming to weigh his words before saying them, he sucked in a deep breath and exhaled slowly. "I was driving on Francis Street near the convention center and was nearing the intersection when I decided to change CDs. But when I went to insert the new one in the CD player, it slipped from my fingers onto the floor. I checked the oncoming traffic then reached for it and. . ."

"That's when you hit me?" Jane shuddered, remembering the dreadful sound of the collision and the instant pain it had caused.

He nodded. "Yes. With the sun shining in my eyes when I looked up, I guess I didn't see the stoplight. All of a sudden, I felt myself being thrown forward and my air bag inflated. I never even saw your car before I hit you."

"I had the right of way! The light was green!" she nearly screamed at him. "Do you have any idea what you did to my car?"

The man closed his eyes tightly shut and shuddered. "Yes, I did see what I did to your car, and I'm so sorry. I can't begin to tell you how sorry."

Normally Jane was easygoing, but she felt her temper rising. A temper she did not even realize she had until a vision of her battered little car surfaced in her mind. "You wrecked my car! It's not even six months old. The first new car I've ever owned, and now I'll have to make payments on a car that probably won't even run!" Tears burst from her eyes.

"I'm sure your insurance would cover it, but don't worry about that." He leaned toward her, both hands gripping the edge of the mattress. "I plan to make

amends. My insurance company will pay to have your car fixed, and if it can't be fixed, they'll replace it for you."

"And what about this?" She held out her battered leg, cringing with pain as she extended it. "I don't have a nickel's worth of insurance to cover the hospital costs."

"I'm sure my insurance will cover that, too, but if it doesn't, I will," he assured her once again. "Please don't be concerned about it. Things will work out."

She looked away from him and stared at the wall. "Don't be concerned about it? That's easy for you to say. You're not the one going through this!"

"I—I know, and I'm so sorry you have to go through this unexpected ordeal. I wish I could undo what happened, but I can't."

Her fingers rubbing at her temples, she let out a deep sigh. "You don't know the half of it, Mister."

"I'm sure you're going to be greatly inconvenienced until your injuries heal, and I will be happy to do anything I can to help you. Anything."

He seemed sincere, but there was no way he could help her. Her injuries and the loss of her car were only the beginning. "Nothing you can do. Not really." She felt her chest heave up and down, the memory and magnitude of her problems nearly overwhelming her. "Only a miracle from God can help me now."

"I wouldn't expect anything like that if I were you," he said matter-of-factly, shrugging with a hopeless gesture.

Upset by his words, she gave him a cold stare. "Why? Why would you say such a thing? God can perform miracles. He's done it in my life many times."

His look was patronizing, and she resented both it and his implication that God could not answer prayer.

"I don't mean to upset you, Mrs. Delaney, but—"

"Miss. It's Miss Delaney."

"Like I said, I don't mean to upset you, Miss Delaney, but there is no scientific proof that there is a God."

Her dander rose at his words. "What a ridiculous thing to say, when there's so much evidence to the contrary!"

"As an educated man, I have no choice. I must bow to the scientific scholars."

"What do they know? How do they explain the miraculous birth of a baby, or the sun rising and setting at exact times, or like my father used to say—a black cow eating green grass and giving white milk and yellow butter?"

He sent a quick glance toward Mildred. "Look, Miss Delaney, I'm sorry. The last thing I want to do is upset you." His voice was soft and kind and seemed to bear no malice. "I should never have started our conversation this way. I merely meant you do not have to rely on some unknown God for a miracle. I ran the stop-light, I hit your car, and I'll gladly face up to my responsibilities and take care of all

of it—your car, your hospital and doctor bills, and anything else you might need.”

Balling her fists, she glared at him. “That’s all well and good, but do you realize your carelessness has ruined my life?”

“Yes, I realize that, and all I can do is say I’m sorry and do the best I can to make up for it. I am a man of honor.” He shifted nervously, rattling the change in his pocket. “I’m sorry about what I said. About your God. I didn’t mean to offend you in any way.”

His words about God *had* angered her, but his softened voice and apology helped soothe both her anger and frustration. However, she had to let this man, who appeared to have no financial problems at all, know what this accident had done to her already messed-up life. Stressed to the limit, she sucked in a deep breath and counted to ten before speaking through gritted teeth, enumerating her problems by counting them on her fingers. “I don’t expect you to be interested, but my car and hospital bills are just the beginning of my problems. Two days ago, the company I have worked for the past twelve years told me they were going to cut back and lay off a number of their employees. I happened to be one of them. I am the caregiver to my aged, ailing mother, which keeps me from getting a second job even if I could find one. She needs medicine I can’t afford to buy for her, the landlord just raised our rent five percent, and my beautiful cocker spaniel died last week of pneumonia. Now do you see why I am upset? Tell me what you’re going to do about *those* things?”

He gave her an incredulous look. “Even if there is a God, I’m not sure even *He* could take care of all those things to your satisfaction. That’s a pretty tall order.”

On the verge of tears, she pressed herself into the propped-up pillow, squeezed her lips tightly together, and crossed her arms, locking her hands into her armpits. “Well, for your information, nothing is too hard for my God. I’m trusting Him to take care of everything, and I know He will!”

“If you are counting on God to provide you with a job, you may be out of work for a long time,” the man countered with a smile that held no hostility. “You’d be much better off going to an employment agency. At least they’d know where the jobs are.”

“God will provide. He always does,” she responded with a positive air, willing herself to remain calm and trying to maintain her dignity. Mildred moved up close to the bed, carefully eyeing her patient. “I’m not sure this conversation is good for you.”

Keene leaped to his feet. “I—I’m so sorry. I never meant to upset her. I’ll come back tomorrow when she’s feeling better. I know this day has been hard on her, and she needs rest.”

“I won’t be here tomorrow. I’m going home as soon as the doctor releases me.” Jane stared at the man, amazed he had taken the time and effort to come to

the hospital so soon after their accident. He didn't need to check on her, yet he had. He could have simply let his insurance company take care of the details and not been bothered. From the look of his beautifully tailored suit, starched white shirt, and designer tie, he was probably some highly paid executive. However, unfortunately, he lacked the best thing in life. A relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Some things money simply could not buy. "Besides, I'm sure you have better things to do with your time than check up on me."

He leaned against the bed, took her hand, and cradled it in his. "Oh, but I wanted to check on you. I'm afraid you're going to be hearing from me a lot for the next few weeks, until you're fully recovered."

"That's not—"

He gave her hand a gentle squeeze. "Oh, but it is necessary. I may not believe in God, but I believe in doing the right thing. Making sure you are all right, your hospital and doctor bills are paid, and your car is either repaired or replaced are going to be the number one priority on my agenda until things are back to normal for you." He gave her a smile that resonated with warmth and concern. "Now, tell me, is there anything I can do to help you?"

Jane stared at him. *Is this guy for real?*

"Just tell me, and I'll do it gladly."

She continued to eye him suspiciously. Although it appeared money was not a problem for him, it was nonetheless a generous offer.

"I don't want you worrying about anything but getting your head and that leg well," he said, and from the sympathy she could read in his eyes, he surely meant what he said. "You must let me do something to help you. Just name it."

She forced a small smile. "Well, if you hear about any job openings, you might let me know."

He paused thoughtfully. "What sort of skills do you have?"

She gave a slight shrug, wincing at the pain in her leg. "I—I really don't have any skills. The only place I've ever worked is Big Bob's Discount House. I started there my senior year of high school, stocking new merchandise, and I've been there ever since, nearly twelve years now."

He gave her a slight frown. "Did you take typing or any business courses in high school?"

"I'm not sure if I took typing or it took me." She chuckled. "I made terrible grades. That typing teacher was cranky and so demanding I cringed every time she looked at me. Even now, all these years later, just the thought of that pretentious woman makes me shudder. I've often thought maybe if I'd had a different teacher, I might have been a better typist. Who knows?"

Keene rubbed his chin as if in deep thought then strode to the window. Jane watched, waiting for him to make some comment, like her dad had done so many

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times, telling her she should have knuckled down, learned to type, and forgotten about the arrogant teacher. But he didn't. After a few minutes, he turned slowly and, keeping his piercing brown-eyed gaze on her, stepped forward. "I think I may have an answer for you."