

# BEYOND SECOND CHANCES

*Heartbreak to Joy*



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SHIRLEY QUIRING MOZENA



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# DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my husband, Jim, who stirred me to write this book. On our refrigerator is a white board with a hand written statement. It says: *Once upon a time, God brought Jim and Shirley together...and they lived happily ever after.* The statement is so true, for God did bring us together, and we will live happily ever after—with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ in Heaven! Our time on earth is up to the Maker of the Universe. He knows our days and we rest in that. He can be trusted.

Jim listened to my stories and asked the questions. And I am grateful. I love you James Patrick Mozena! You brought joy into my life once again.





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I am grateful for my editors, Christi Krug, Danica Swiggers, and Joyce Erickson. Thank you.



The five of us recently (Pictured L-R in their birth order: Joyce, Roger, Shirley, Eileen, Betsy).



## CHAPTER 1

# THE WEDDING IS OFF

“Their strength is to sit still.”

—Isaiah 30:7

“I can’t do this,” he said.  
“Do what?”

“Marry you.”

My stomach plummeted. My heart raced as I gulped air. My hands shook.

We were talking on the phone, just as we did every evening before Ron went to bed. He would wear sweats and relax in his favorite recliner while I would curl up on my couch, imagining him beside me.

His voice always got to me. It was a deep baritone with a sexy twist to it. I could see him sitting with his head back, taking his wire-framed glasses off and rubbing the ridge of his nose as he thought and talked. He lived more than two hundred miles away—but we would be together soon.

“What?” I asked. *Had I heard him correctly?*

There had been no indication that something was wrong. We’d sent loving text messages to each other all day. Just that weekend, we’d gone through Ron’s home to decide what we’d keep, sell, or give away. I’d put earnest money down on a house we were buying together. The wedding was in five weeks. We loved each other—or so I thought.

Our engagement had been tumultuous. My daughter hadn't approved. "Mom. He isn't your type. You can do better. It's too soon since you've met."

"It's no sooner than when Blair asked me," I countered. "What's wrong with him? He's a Christian. He loves me."

"What's the hurry?" she asked, frustrated. "I think you're desperate to be married."

"I am *not* desperate!" I said hotly.

My family and their opinions were important to me. But I stubbornly thought Ron was a fine man. We shared our faith. His politics were similar to mine. He loved his kids.

But there were red flags. His sister, Stephanie said, "Ron just can't be happy—I don't know why. He's impulsive!"

Once, after purchasing a motorcycle and realizing it was too expensive for his budget, he rode it to the dealership, parked it in the lot, and left without making another payment.

His past relationships had been rocky and he'd been married several times. *That's before he met Christ, though*, I thought.

Small voices clamored for my attention. *This feels wrong. Should I be the only one putting money down on the house? Shouldn't we be sharing the earnest money agreement?*

Yet I had ignored all the signs.

"I think we need to put the marriage on hold," Ron continued as my mind reeled. Numb, I hung up the phone.

A verse from my early morning devotions drifted into my mind. *He does great things past finding out. Yes, wonders without wonder.*<sup>1</sup>

I knew my Savior had done great things in my life. He'd been there during the hard times. Two years earlier, after only seventeen months of marriage, my second husband Blair had died of a brain aneurysm.

But life was better now, wasn't it? I was engaged to be married! Soon I wouldn't be alone anymore.

That morning I had begun my prayers, lifting up my children and plans for the day. As I closed my prayer, I uttered words that surprised me. "Oh God, I don't have the strength to do it, but if this marriage is out of Your will, then *You* will have to end it." I

was mystified by my words but didn't think much about it. After all, Ron and I had prayed regularly for God's will regarding our relationship.

It was strange, the rush of emotions that flooded me that night after the call. I was embarrassed and hurt by the rejection. This pain was different than the deaths of Bill and Blair. I was angry at Ron. Why didn't he want me? These feelings reflected a disturbing part of my personality I didn't like. There was pride gleaming back there and it wasn't pretty! Yet beyond the feelings of rejection, I also felt relieved.

As I lay in bed that night, I reflected. *The house—I put money down. The financing is nearly done. They're going to appraise it in a few days.* Even though Ron said we should not talk for a week, I needed to know whether to call the realtor. I slept fitfully that night.

Next morning I texted him. *Should I call off buying the house?* After twenty minutes, he responded with one word.

Yes.

In a panic, I rang his number. When he answered, his voice was cold and distant. The engagement was over.

The realtor informed me it might be one day too late to call off the sale. Unless the seller agreed to forgive the cancellation, I'd lose my five grand. I didn't want to buy the house if we were not going to get married. *Ron will have to help with the loss of money,* I thought.

I visited my pastor, Brian. It was a busy afternoon with many preparations for Good Friday and Easter. Pastor Brian sat back in his chair and took a sip of coffee, glancing at the photo of his young family in front of him. I knew he cared about me by the way he spoke, gazing into my eyes carefully and respectfully.

"Shirley, this is not a surprise to God," he said with a serious expression on his face. "It's the best way."

In my heart, I knew he was right. I called my family, who were as shocked as I was about the wedding cancellation. Their faces seemed relieved—and yet they told me how much they cared. They felt my pain.

I needed space to pray and think. I decided on a weekend trip. Nestled in the Willamette Valley, the Oregon Gardens offered lovely accommodations and a quiet place to stay.

My stomach churned as I drove through the winding roads toward my destination. With each curve in the road, a beautiful spring scene attempted to capture my attention. I wanted to drive to Ron's home and beg him to change his mind. I longed for his arms around me but I was angry at him for breaking our engagement on the phone instead of face-to-face. I was wounded and wanted to strike out.

As I walked among the early spring gardens, new beginnings of growth showed in the bare, brown palette of the grounds. My heart felt barren. The early pink cherry blossoms glowed against the dark trunks and reached up to the blue sky, studded with wispy white clouds. The ponds were coming to life with new grasses growing among the dead cattails and thistle. I listened to the birds singing.

Awareness flooded me: I was alone. I hated it! I strolled through the grounds and admired the arrogant, yellow daffodils with their large trumpets, as if declaring a joyous sound in color. Nearby, their jonquil cousins with white-collar petals and orange snub noses seemed to say, "We're important too." There were house-sized flower boxes holding bare trees. Yellow and white primroses grew on the ground beneath, seeming to smile in the spring sunlight. After all of these lovely images, I turned to the friendly faces of the purple and yellow pansies. My heart lifted. I knew I would be okay.

I walked slowly back to my room, where a king-sized bed nearly filled the space, covered with a cozy white comforter and a darker green shawl at the foot. I turned on the gas fireplace, opened the French doors onto my secluded deck, and sat at the table to compose a letter.

Dear Ron,

I've been thinking for two days now and I think I can write it without too much sharpness.

I will miss your gestures of love.

You left a mess for me to clean up—but that's nothing like the mess you made of my heart, Ron. That will take a little more time.

I will be okay, though. For I know about loss. I'm glad you showed me who you really are. It is better this way.

I felt better after I wrote the letter. *It sounds bitter*, I thought. Even so, I recopied it and sent it to his email address.

I decided to treat myself to a dinner date. *Alone, but not lonely*. I dressed up in my new cream skirt with a ruffled, sleeveless peach blouse. Shimmering stockings graced my legs and strappy, satin cream heels completed my outfit. I had bought those shoes and stockings to wear on my wedding day. *I'll wear them now*, I thought.

“You look lovely,” the maitre’d said as he seated me. I thanked him and glanced around the room. An elderly couple nearby had nearly finished dinner. The gentleman was dressed in khaki slacks with a natty navy blazer. She was wearing a silk green pantsuit with a pink rose corsage pinned to her left lapel. She seemed to have a debilitating muscular disease when she scooted toward the edge of the booth. Her tall, slightly stooping husband helped her rise from the elevated seating area. There was a little struggle as she attempted to slide from her seat and support herself on the three-footed cane her husband was holding. She glanced over at me and our eyes met.

“Enjoy your youth!” she joked.

“I’m not that far behind you,” I retorted, smiling. We chuckled together and I bid them a good evening.

A server came to my table, sporting a neatly tied white apron and a Marine Corps tattoo peeking above his white dress shirt. “Would you like something to drink?”

Why not? I was treating myself! “What about this Moonstone Martini?”

I waited for my treat and watched another couple sharing a dessert. I wondered what they were celebrating—an anniversary? Or perhaps the Easter weekend. Again I realized I was alone. I felt a stab of pain. I didn’t like it at all.

The server brought my ruby-red drink in a martini glass and I began to sip with anticipation. I was astounded by the fermented fruity bitterness. It reminded me of cough syrup and I felt a wave of irritation. Why hadn’t I stuck with a Lemon Drop, or a glass of good wine?

The penne pasta with spinach and roasted garlic was passable. Most likely it was my attitude and not the chef's creation that left me unsatisfied with my meal. I sighed, tossed my napkin on the table, and walked back to my room. As I walked through the door I pulled off the shoes that were pinching my toes. *So much for wearing those while standing.* "They're killing my feet," I said softly to the empty room.

I knew the night would be long but I was prepared for it. I opened my Bible to Habakkuk 2:1.

I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me.

As I prayed, I felt myself wanting an answer immediately.

I read a little of Hannah Whitall Smith,<sup>2</sup> a writer from more than one hundred years ago. She had struggled in a situation where there was nothing to be done but sit still and wait. I realized I needed to wait, too.

I thought back again to the prayer I had said three days earlier: "Oh God, I don't have the strength to do it, but if this marriage is not in Your will, then *You* will have to end it." I had asked God for an answer—and He had given it.

I now needed to begin the task of forgiving Ron. God was using two imperfect people to do His will in their lives. I begged God to help me move forward, away from the planned marriage, toward peace and His future for me.

Perhaps I would never be married again. In any case, I needed to submit my will to God's. I set myself to the work of grief and forgiveness. I knew it would happen soon, even if I couldn't feel it yet. I surrendered all my thoughts to God, and just before dawn, I fell asleep.

When I woke later that morning, I was at peace. I was sad but grateful for the holy intervention so evident in my prayer earlier that week. I knew it was God's best for me—He *had* spoken to me through that prayer, said not by me but by the Holy Spirit living in me. Though I was hurt, I knew my heart would heal—if I allowed the Comforter to help.



## THE WEDDING IS OFF

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Later that day, I drove home and began adjusting my life back to what it had been before I met Ron. This experience was different from losing a loved one to death. The wrenching feelings of loss and abandonment were different. In this break-up, I was angry—I was angry at Ron.