

Windtree Press Presents

Gifts of the Heart

Maggie Lynch, Editor

Windtree Press
Portland, Oregon

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Thoughts About Love

"All, everything that I understand, I only understand because I love." —
Leo Tolstoy

"You know you're in love when you can't fall asleep because reality is finally better than your dreams." — *Dr. Seuss*

"The best and most beautiful things in this world cannot be seen or even heard, but must be felt with the heart." — *Helen Keller*

"Being deeply loved by someone gives you strength, while loving someone deeply gives you courage." — *Lao Tzu*

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The Telltale Heart by Sarah Raplee

How can there be a win-win situation when two young men love the same woman? This story of best friends, lost chances, and found love will bring a tear to your eye and a little skip in the beat of your heart.

Is He the One? by Judith Ashley

When her best friend and long-time lover proposes marriage, Sophia hesitates to say “yes.” Unable to trust her heart, she analyzes their relationship using Dr. William Glasser’s concepts of basic psychological needs. By morning she has her answer.

Saved by the Ring by Diana McCollum

A soldier leaves for Afghanistan and the love of his life has refused to wait for him. Through war and injury he remains faithful and motivates his recovery with the thought of seeing her one more time.

Be My Valentine by Susan Lute

The widow of a senator, and survivor of his abuse, returns to practicing medicine in rural Oregon. Navigating a relationship with her obstinate teenaged step-daughter, while carrying the baby of her late husband, does not make it easy to open her heart to love or trust again.

Dancing on Water by Mercer Addison

After surviving the sinking of the Titanic and the loss of her fiancée, Letha is determined to overcome her fear of sailing as she boards the SS McCall for a one-day voyage down the Hudson. But her past and present collide in a river of emotions where she must choose which path, and which man, will be the best way to move forward with her life.

Heart of a Highlander by Collette Cameron

A young widow with a small child faces a difficult choice in the highlands of Scotland. Attracted to her husband's best friend, they both struggle to accept the wonderful love she had in the past and to reconcile their own loving relationship for a future together.

The Flaming Heart of Winter by Pamela Cowan

The legend of Ann'er pits the love of life against the love of another. Mora is faced with untenable choices in order to break out of the self-made prison of her love for Anum.

Matchmaker Cat by Jane Killick

Who helps Rosemary turn around her love life? Who puts the dating website on her computer? Who finds the attractive man with the smiling eyes? Is it a coincidence? Or is Chester the cat hiding a secret?

Metro Goes to London by Susie Slanina

A call from London brings Sherry and Metro to help a sad and lonely princess. They help her to bring laughter and happiness back into her life through the unconditional love of a pet.

Foreword

Like the love and relationships we celebrate on Valentines Day, the history of this day is also messy. At least three martyrs named Valentine are part of the early Christian church's traditions and commemoration: one in Rome, another in Terni (central Italy in Umbria) and another in Africa. The stories of these men range from being protectors of early Christians to ones who married those who were forbidden to marry in those times. Throughout history there have been couples forbidden to marry because of race, culture, different economic status, gender identification, or even simply because a king, a slave owner or some other power wished to have control of the individual. In some ways, those men celebrated as Saint Valentine were the rebels and protestors of their beliefs then.

Though most of the western world embraces the Bishop Valentine in Rome, who was martyred in the late 5th century, celebrations of love bonds started long before the Christian church and can be found in early pagan rituals, some of which are still practiced today in ceremonies for declaring love, handfasting—a one year commitment, weddings for long-term commitment, and in a variety of blessing and naming ceremonies for different life passages.

For most people, Valentines Day is a time when we celebrate the power of love in our lives. This includes the unconditional and simple love of children for family, friends and pets, as well as the complicated and sometimes messy love of adults for their family, their children, and their partners or spouses. This anthology contains all those types of love.

My parents, married since 1953, were engaged on Valentines Day and they always celebrated their time together much more on Valentines Day than their anniversary four months later. I expect it was their statement that the real commitment date began at the acceptance of the marriage proposal. So, for me, Valentines Day has always held a special place in my heart.

Like the Windtree Press Christmas anthology, this collection contains a mix of stories, ranging from another children's story about Metro the Little Dog (the last story in the collection) to fun and suspenseful paranormal

stories and to adult stories of first love, long-time love, and love found through hardship. I hope you enjoy each of these as much as I did.

Our wish is that all our readers find a love that wraps you in warmth, compassion, and peace.

Maggie Lynch

Saved by the Ring

by Diana McCollum

Ben couldn't believe Lizzie had dumped him because he signed on for another tour of duty with the Army. They'd been sweethearts since high school. Seven years together. They had talked of getting married and the family they'd have. He didn't understand her change of heart.

He stomped to his truck parked at the curb in front of Lizzie's house. His hand shook as he inserted the key into the lock of the old 1989 Chevy pickup.

Yanking the door open, he slid into the driver's seat and leaned his forehead against the steering wheel, took a deep breath, and fought to control the knot of nausea forming in his stomach. At twenty-four he could damn well make his own decisions. Staying with his Army unit was a decision he hadn't made on a whim. The sweltering June sun only added to his temper.

God, he felt like his heart had been ripped out. He had re-upped for her, for a chance of a future together. He didn't want to end up pumping gas like his brother or doing some other menial job. He wanted a wife and a family, and a job to support them.

The Army would ensure he could afford college and get a degree in computer science. He'd be able to get a VA home loan and take care of his family. Lizzie didn't care, spoiled self-centered Lizzie.

"Ben, Ben...wait!" Lizzie ran toward the truck barefoot, long brown hair trailing behind her. He paused for a second, glimpsing the high school cheerleader he'd fallen in love with seven years ago.

He turned the key, shifted into drive and floored the gas. She'd had her say. His pride didn't need any more abuse from her regarding how he should live his life. He fingered the ring box in his pocket as he glanced in the rearview mirror. The road was empty. Good thing he'd had sense enough not to ask her today.

At the next traffic light, Ben took the ring out of the box. The sun reflected off the simple solitaire diamond. He rolled down the window. Maybe he'd throw the ring in the river, be done with love.

No, he'd keep it, for now. He placed the sparkling ring back in the box as the light turned green.

Her words burned in his memory. "Ben, if you re-enlist there is no guarantee you won't be sent to Iraq. I can't go through not knowing if you are safe or not, not again." Lizzie had turned on the tears, always a good move, only this time they didn't work. "I want to be with you. Don't I mean more to you than the Army?"

When he told her why he had re-enlisted, she took her final stand with her arms crossed. "I'm not postponing my life for you, Ben. You do what you have to do, but I'm not waiting. I'm not an Army wife and I don't plan on ever being one. The stress was too much during your last deployment. When you went missing for four days I couldn't eat or sleep. I almost lost my job. I can't go through the anxiety again, I...can't."

She turned away from him and stared out the kitchen window. "Go. Leave," she whispered.

He turned to go, hesitating with his hand on the gold-tone doorknob, hoping they could talk it out, find a way to make the relationship work. He waited a few seconds for her to tell him to stay.

She didn't.

* * * * *

Six months later in the Iraq desert, the Cougar Ben was riding in set off an IED. As Ben lay in the sand listening for the whirl of the Medevac copter to arrive, he thought of Lizzie. He had thought of her almost daily since the breakup. Once he got to the war zone, he'd tried to put her out of his mind. The sadness of missing Lizzie and never seeing her again overwhelmed him and a tear slid down his face.

Fire in his core engulfed him. He gasped. Sweat dripped from under his helmet. The hand he passed across his face came away bloody. Now with the potential of death looming, he mumbled a low whisper of a prayer. "Lord, let me see her one more time."

Helicopter rotors kicked up a cloud of dust and in seconds a medic was by Ben's side. His ears rang from the blast, and the noise from the copter made it impossible to hear what the medic was saying. The next thing he knew he was being strapped to the litter and hoisted into the Blackhawk.

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THIS IS THE END OF THE SAMPLE