

The Decision

Nora R. Hobbs



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The Decision

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New Start

Beth poked the ground round steak in its tray covered with clear plastic wrap. It looked red and fresh, but she knew that didn't really mean anything, because it could be food coloring. Eight dollars and twenty cents for a little over a pound and a half of meat and she didn't need very much of it just for herself. She sighed and put it into her grocery basket with the half-gallon of milk, a bag of pre-prepared salad mix, and a few cans of vegetables.

When Tim was home, she loved to fix dinner for them, but now since he had been away, she found fixing dinner a chore she would rather not have to do.

As she waited in line to get checked out, she was having thoughts of him for the first time in a long while. It

seemed as though he had been gone for years, instead of months. He called and said he had to go on special assignment and she had not heard a word from him since. That was over three months ago. Not a phone call, e-mail, letter, or even a postcard ...nothing.

At first she was worried, then fearful, then hurt, and now ...accepting. She missed him terribly for a while and had to deal with the loneliness, the emptiness of her bed, her arms and the nagging craving for sexual satisfaction. What a nightmare it seemed to her now as she set her items on the check-out stand.

She watched the checker scan each item. They passed the scanner and it was like the days rolling by in the quiet solitude of her apartment. It seemed to her that she was as unaware of life as the can of mixed vegetables was of the scanner.

In her two years of marriage to Tim, he had been away from home for weeks at a time. As she sat in the back seat of the cab, she did some calculations and figured she had spent the total of eight months with him being home, eight months out of two years.

As she unlocked the apartment building entrance door with her key, she came to the conclusion that she needed to get a life. She was a young woman, somewhat attractive, and she was wasting her young years waiting on a man who might never come back. Even if he did, she had to do something with her life while she was waiting for him. Sitting in the apartment reading books, watching TV and movies was not living... it was existence. Something had to give.

She decided not to take the elevator to her third floor apartment anymore. She was going to do things differently with her life, starting now, so she took the stairs. She was nearly out of breath when she reached the top of the stairs on her floor. She was out of shape. She guessed that came from being a bank teller and not getting any exercise. She

put that on the top of her newly inspired list of things to change.

The apartment was large and filled with expensive furniture. She had a large bank account for Tim's checks were automatically deposited and he made a lot of money compared to the paltry salary she received as a bank teller. Two sofas sat in front of a fireplace with a large square end table between them making a 'V' shape. At the end of each sofa were twin end tables and some occasional chairs. A massive entertainment center flowed up and around the sandstone fireplace, forming a mantel to it. To the right were the dining room and kitchen beyond.

There was a patio door off the living room with a tall window on each side that matched the door. This led out onto a balcony with a glider on one side for sitting and a wrought iron patio table and four chairs on the other. In the corner near the building was a potted miniature date palm in a half-barrel. The view was of the small building entrance park and a busy street below. Directly across the street was the duplicate of her building, only the façade was a little different.

The apartment had one large bedroom, and a smaller one. The master bedroom was across the room directly in front of the door she just entered. It had a queen-size bed with a bedstead in polished cherry wood and the chest of drawers and dresser to match. There was a night stand on each side of the bed and a satin drapery hung over the bed on the wall with each side drawn back and held in place by a silver leaf. A wallpaper mural of a Chinese garden hung behind it, making the satin drapery appear to frame a window. The bath contained the necessities, with a hot tub that sat on a riser against the back wall plus a large walk in closet.

She fixed her dinner and froze the remainder of the steak. Pouring a second cup of coffee, she wandered out onto the patio and sat down in the glider. High up in the

air, there was an airplane making a white streak across the sky and she wondered where the people in it were going. She let out a deep sigh. At least they were going somewhere.

The phone rang and she stood up and went to answer it. She was in no hurry. If it rang several times, it didn't make any difference. There was a time that she sat on the sofa and grabbed it on the second ring, hoping it was Tim. After a while, she lost hope of that and its ring no longer made her heart skip. It was either her mom or one of the girls at work.

"Hello?"

"Hi Beth!" She recognized Kelli's voice. They were best friends. "Now before you say no, listen to me. There is a Bunko party at my friend Sandy's house tonight. You can't just sit around your entire life, waiting for an absentee husband to phone, which might never happen. One of the girls can't make it, so get on something comfortable and I'll pick you up in about an hour."

"All right, shall I bring something?"

There was dead silence for a long moment. "Uh ...is this Beth Rizner?"

Beth could not help but laugh at her friend's shocked reply. "Yes, it's me."

"Wow! All right! Too kewl!" Kelli crooned. "Catch you on the door."

"Okay, bye!"

Beth smiled at herself. Do some things for fun, number two on the new list. She was kind of amazed that there was a spark of excitement to be going somewhere. She was ready way ahead of time and decided to go down to the park in front of the building and sit on the little bench to wait.

It was going to be a nice evening. A soft breeze shoved her long, medium-brown hair around as she

watched the cars drive by on the two-lane road in front of the apartment complex.

She had never played Bunko before, but she had listened to the girls in the break room talk about it. It sounded kind of fun. It was a regular Thursday thing for them and they always seemed to look forward to going.

Her attention was drawn to a tiny squirrel sitting on the curb, watching the traffic come and go. Beth felt a little fear for it being so close to the traffic. It rose up on its hind legs and sniffed the air. It didn't seem to be disturbed by the cars that came close to it. Then suddenly, it shot out across the road, its tail humped behind it. A car squealed its brakes, but the little fellow was not deterred. It only served to put a spark in his going and he dashed up on the grass across the road and sat down. Then he twitched his tail at the traffic as to say, "You didn't get me!"

While Beth was thinking on this, Kelli drove up in her car and honked. Beth jumped up, ran over and climbed in quickly, but even at that, the fellow behind her honked and frowned.

"Hi!" Beth smiled at her.

"Hi!" Kelli returned and raised one sculptured eyebrow at her. Kelli was a cute woman with short auburn hair that had frosted highlights. She had thin lips that made a bright smile. She studied Beth a moment with her deep hazel eyes. "What's up?" she asked finally.

"Nothing," Beth returned and smiled at her curiosity.

"What happened to Mrs. Stay At Home?" Kelli questioned.

"She died in the supermarket today," Beth returned, smiling. "She just keeled over."

"When is the funeral?" Kelli grinned.

"Cremation," Beth grinned back.

"Oh, I see," Kelli nodded.

"I have decided to get a life. I can't wait on Tim forever," Beth confessed.

“Now, you're getting smart,” Kelli encouraged.

Beth looked out the side window and watched the buildings and trees go by through her reflection there. Her face was thin, *too thin*, she thought, and her lips seemed too big for her face. She had a nice nose and hazel eyes with blue accents set under eyebrows that were nice without sculpting them. Tim used to tell her she looked like a doll and sadly, she realized, that is just exactly what he had made her, a lifeless thing that sat on the sofa waiting for him to come and take her in his arms. Yes, that Beth Rizner had died. This Beth Rizner wanted to live, breathe and feel alive again.

Sandy lived in a ranch style house in the suburbs on a quiet street. There were three cars there already. While they waited for her to answer the doorbell, they could hear the light laughter of female voices coming through the door. Sandy, who was a bookkeeper at the bank, greeted them with a hug and invited them in. When they followed her from the foyer into the living room, there where three bunko tables set up.

Kelli said loudly, “Everyone, I would like to introduce you to my new friend Beth Rizner.” There were three women in there besides Kelli and Sandy. They all stared at Kelli with a puzzled look. Every one of them worked with her at the bank. Beth just grinned and waited to see where Kelli was going with this.

“We know Beth,” Tracy took the bait.

“No, the Beth Rizner you knew died today in the supermarket and was cremated. Tonight is going to be a wake for her and the birth of a new and exciting Beth Rizner.” A series of murmurs, oohs and aahs and congratulations ran through the crowd and Sandy offered them cocktails.

Tracy was in her mid-thirties, the oldest of them all, and though she had a head on her like a computer, she was

always a little slow at common things. She was not what you would consider blond, but her hair was bordering on it and she was the brunt of a lot of blond jokes and puns. She was easy going and usually took them with a grin.

Ginger was there beside her. She was a real blond, but as smart as a whip and, Beth thought, a little snooty. Maybe that was because of blond jokes. She was a teller like Beth and Kelli.

Then there was Trudy, another teller and she was a fun loving goofball. She took nothing too seriously, even when it should be. She was a black woman who had long curly frosted hair. It gave her the appearance of being lightly gray headed. It was very becoming on her, though.

Soon there were other women coming in, some Beth knew, others she was introduced to. There were twelve women there and as it is when women get together, eventually the conversation gets around to men. The married ones complained about their husbands' bad habits and neglect, and the others told about the guys they had met or were seeing at the moment. Beth listened, saying nothing. However, one of the ladies she had just met had to ask her if she was married.

Beth responded, "I used to have a husband, but the government stole him."

"Stole him? What do you mean?" the woman asked, somewhat bewildered.

"He's away on government business," Beth explained.

"Oh, okay, I understand."

"He's been gone for over three months now," she returned.

Beth really did enjoy the party. Drank too many cocktails, and was feeling it when Kelli dropped her off at the apartment saying, "See you in the morning."

Beth waved at her through the window and then let herself into the building with her key. She went over to the elevator and punched the button to summon it. While she

waited, the list for her new life came to mind. She then turned and went over to the stairs and started climbing. Then with a slight giggle, she started running up the stairs like she use to do at school, going to the classes on the second and third floor.

She had just rounded the stairs corner to go to the third floor when there was a man in front of her coming down just as fast as she was going up. They ran into one another and she felt herself lose balance. However, he was quick and caught her around the waist. "Whoa, there!" he grinned down at her, his blue eyes sparked with delight. He made no effort to release her. He was somewhat handsome. He wore a headband around his dark sandy medium length hair that had a slight curl to it on the ends. His tee-shirt showed some grime and he wore faded jeans with a utility belt around his waist. "I almost made a sled out of you," he chuckled.

"I'm afraid I would have given you a bumpy ride." Beth grinned back.

"That's the best kind," he returned.

Beth caught the pun and said softly, "I think I'm safe now. You can let go." She was sure she had seen him around the complex, but had never really paid any attention to him.

"You sure? This is kind of nice."

"Well, the way I see it, that's the only way to get to my apartment."

"You live here?" he blinked at her.

"Yes, on the third floor."

"And we've never met? I'm Steve Manchester, AM."

"AM?" Beth tilted her head.

"Yeah, Apartment Maintenance," he explained.

"Oh, well, I didn't fall, so I don't think I need to be repaired. You can let go now."

“I don't know, sometimes injuries show up later after accidents. Maybe you should give me your name and address just in case.”

“My name is Beth Rizner and if I need you, I'll just call maintenance.”

“Beth, that's a pretty name. Pleased to have run into you.”

“I can tell. Will you please release me now?”

“Okay, but I don't take rejection well.” He released his embrace and stood in front of her.

She looked up at him, waiting for him to move, but he just stood there looking down at her with those penetrating blue eyes. She shook her head with a smile and went around him. She felt his eyes on her until he could see her no more.

In her apartment, she kept feeling his arms around her and found she like it. It had been such a long time since she had been that close to a man, much less having someone hold her like that. She was somewhat surprised that she had noticed the muscles in his arms. She scolded herself for the thoughts and went to the shower.