

Chapter Twenty-One

Duluth, June 1968

Stacey quietly watched as Gary stood next to the open bedroom window, gazing out at Lake Superior. The night air of early June chilled the room, but Gary seemed so deep in thought he didn't appear to notice.

The glow of the moonlight spread across Superior's glassy waters. The water was so clear it was difficult to see where the horizon ended and the lake began, as if there was no beginning and no end. Many times, since his return from Nam, Gary would spend hours staring out at the lake.

Stacey wondered if he ever thought about how miserable their lives had become. Their constant bickering seemed unavoidable and living together was becoming unbearable.

His shirt rumpled and unbuttoned, Gary seemed to sense her presence and turned from the window.

Stacey steadied her voice. "Gary, we need to talk."

He avoided her eyes and sat down on the bed. "So, talk."

His callous reply brought only a glassy-eyed stare from her eyes.

He stood up to face her; his voice was harsh and loud. "Speak up woman! Are you cowardly?"

Stacey gasped, her face draining of color. "I don't know who you are. The man I married would never be so cruel."

He threw her a sneering glance. His voice was like ice. "Why can't you understand? I can't be the man the married!"

Her patience gone, her own voice pitched close to screaming.

"Then help me to understand who you are, Gary!"

A shadow of emptiness flooded over his face. He walked back to the window, bracing himself with one arm against its frame. As he continued to stare out at the lake, the bitter words came tumbling out, one upon another.

"What make you think you can understand, Stace? How do you know how it feels to have your friend blown to bits in front of your eyes? Have you ever held a dying man in your arms, listening to his screams, begging for you to kill him to put him out of his misery? Have you ever been so scared that you wanted to die to escape?" He began sob.

Stacey rushed to his side, grasping his arm. "Please, Gary, don't say anymore."

He whirled around, the tears in his eyes burning like acid in her soul. "Why? Because you only want me to tell you how much I love you? You've been begging me to talk, but you don't like what you hear, do you?"

She covered her ears. "Stop! I won't listen to this!"

He grabbed her wrists, pulling her hands from her ears.

"Well, you will listen to this! I've found someone who accepts me for what I am now. Never questions. Never pushes. Just takes me for me."

Tears flooded her eyes and rolled down her face as she struggled to be free of his grasp. "Let go of me!"

He only gripped her wrists tighter, his voice grew louder and louder.

"I don't have to see the disappointment on her face when I can't tell her how much I love her!"

"Stop, it please, Gary," she sobbed.

He pushed her way and brushed his hands over his face.

She ran for the bathroom, her face drenched in sweat and tears as she kneeled retching and vomiting, the pain so intense; the emptiness was so deep, it screamed for her to wake from this horrible nightmare.

But then out of nowhere Gary was kneeling by her side, wiping her face with a cool washcloth.

"Stace, forgive me. I just lost it."

"Tell me you didn't sleep with her," she cried.

When his eyes gave her the answer and she could only weep.

Gently he placed his arms around her with a tenderness that was only a memory.

"It's over now, Stace. I won't ever see her again. I promise."

Stacey picked up her hairbrush and stroked her long red hair letting it fall softly around her shoulders. She stared at herself in the mirror and noticed the tired lines around her eyes.

It had been six months since Gary claimed his affair was over, but Stacey still couldn't stop doubting him.

Katherine was livid when Stacey told her about it. . .

"I knew he was just like Sonny!"

"That's not true, Katy. I drove Gary away by not accepting his behavior after Nam."

"Oh, that's a Walker brainwashing if I ever heard one. Nobody forces a man into an affair. He had one

because he's too damn selfish to think about anyone but himself."

"But I promised God until death do us part and -- and I still love him."

"Now you sound like Momma. Do you want to spend your life raising a bunch of kids and living off welfare?"

"Gary would never abandon his children. That much I know. Not after living without parents himself."

"Even so, I still think you should get out of there and come to Chicago. He could get rough on you."

Visions of Gary's irrational behavior had flashed in Stacey's mind but she'd reassured Katherine, "Gary would never hurt me."

Stacey shook her head, trying to refocus on the present. *Why couldn't she forget Katy's words? She wondered if she should confront Gary.*

She heard footsteps on the stairs and took a deep breath. She walked to the bedroom doorway and watched Gary empty the change from his pockets onto the dresser.

"You've been getting home awfully late this week."

Gary turned and shrugged. "Maybe."

Shaking inside, Stacey could feel the beads of sweat forming around her mouth. "Gary, I can't stand living like this any longer."

"Living like what? Your constant innuendos about me having another affair."

"That's not fair, Gary."

"Fair? He scowled. "Maybe if you'd given me time after Nam."

"Time?" She felt her face flush with rage. "Did you need time for two or three women to understand you?" She spun around to leave the room. "You make me sick!"

He seized her shoulder. "Don't you ever walk away from me!"

She thrust her shoulder forward, releasing his hand. She started walking down the hall. "It's no good, Gary. I think we should talk about a divorce."

She shuddered at how easily the words had come from her mouth.

Gary rushed after her. "A divorce? Is that what your bitch of a sister told you to do?"

"Katy is not a bitch! And she has nothing to do with this."

"*She* probably has everything to do with it!"

Stacey kept walking, ignoring his comment. She could feel Gary's breath warm on her neck as he followed closely on her heels.

"Stace, listen to me. We can work this out. We can have a child."

Stacey shook her head. "A child isn't the answer to our problems." She walked into the bathroom and turned to shut the door.

Gary slammed his hand against the door, blocking its closure.

Stacey paled, overcome by nausea. "Please, Gary. I need a shower."

"I want to talk about this!"

Her hands trembled as she unbuttoned her robe, pretending he wasn't there, hoping he would leave. Her legs felt like rubber as she stepped into the shower and quickly pulled the curtain. Turning on the water, she took a deep breath and closed her eyes, letting the warm water flood over her body, hoping to soothe her jangled nerves. Rolling her shoulders to release the tension, she reached for the soap, spreading its rich lather over her body.

It was then she heard the rustling of the curtain. She opened her terror filled eyes to see Gary's fingers edging around the side.

Flinging it open, he stood glaring at her.

"What do you think you're doing," she screamed, reaching to pull it back.

But Gary was faster, wrapping the curtain in his fist and yanking it from the rod.

She stepped back, bracing herself against the wall of the shower. "Get away from me!"

"I want to talk about this - now!" He lunged for her arm as she wildly slapped in the air.

Suddenly, she was reliving a horror hidden deep in her subconscious, a horror from her childhood now erupting, plunging her into terror. "Don't hurt me!"

Her deep gasping breaths echoed through the pounding water as Gary groped to reach her.

Swearing under his breath, he stepped fully dressed into the tub and reached for the faucet.

Before he could touch it, she pounced on him, like a caged animal, ripping her fingernails down his face and beating on his chest with her fists.

Blood oozed down Gary's cheek as he struggled to seize her wrists.

Her arms thrashed uncontrollably into the air.

"Are you nuts, Stace? What in the hell the matter with you?"

She was deaf to his words through the pounding water.

Dodging her swinging arms, he grabbed her hair with one hand and pulled her to her knees.

When his hand grasped the back of her neck, she exploded into blind hysterical screaming. "I hate you! I hate you! Don't touch me!"

The sympathetic concern that had momentarily filled Gary's eyes was quickly replaced with arrogance. "You're my wife. I'll touch you whenever I damn well please!"

She clawed at his hands, fighting to remove them from her neck. "No, I won't let you hurt me again!"

Muffling her screams with one hand, Gary pulled her from the shower, his other hand slipping over her soapy, wet skin as she wrestled to be free of his grasp.

Forcing her into the bedroom, he pushed her down onto the bed. As he stood looming over her, she fought repeatedly to get up.

She screamed as his hand smashed against her face, knocking her flat across the bed.

The jolt forced her into reality. "Gary, I didn't mean it. I don't know why."

"Shut up! I'll talk now and this time you'll listen. You'll have my baby whether you want to or not. Then we'll see how quickly you get your damn divorce!"

She watched in horror as he peeled off his wet clothes. She willed her body to move, to run, to hide. Yet not even the smallest muscle was at her command. Paralyzed with fear, she opened her mouth, but only silent screams echoed in her mind. She was powerless to stop him.

Soon his unbearable weight was upon her.

Tears streamed down her face as he held her arms and licked at her breasts. She arched her back, whimpering, begging, "Please don't, Gary."

He whispered in her ear. "Let's make a baby."

Still fighting to withstand his strength, she moaned as he forced her legs apart with his hand; crying out, she sucked in her breath as he entered her.

"Please, Gary. Don't destroy all the love I have for you."

For a moment he hesitated, his eyes softening as he listened to her plea.

Then he plunged into her.

The minutes of his satisfaction seemed like hours, her sobbing seeming to bring him some sort of sadistic pleasure.

When it was over, her red swollen eyes searched for remorse on his face, but found none.

She watched him walk from the room and listened as the even the moronic pounding of the bathroom shower couldn't be covered by her sobbing.

She closed her eyes praying for the memory of her ordeal to wash away but could only feel betrayal, only feel violated, finally forced to face the truth she had avoided for so long.

The man she married had died in Vietnam, and she could never accept the one that had returned in his place.

To find out how Stacey and Katherine continue to cope with their lives under the influence of this terrible curse, you'll want to read all four books of the Rubies Family Saga.

Check out [my authors page](#) on Amazon.com to read all about the books in the series..