

Chapter Ten

Duluth The Present April 1992

Stacey arrived home from the office feeling disillusioned and exhausted. Not only had an irate client forced her to cancel her afternoon session with Gregg Phillips, but restructuring the client's advertising portfolio had taken her until well past nine o'clock.

The April rains left a damp chill in the air and a mist of fog blanketing the city. It was a day that dredged up all the memories she fought to erase. After lighting the fireplace, Stacey changed into her robe and slippers and fixed herself a hot cup of cocoa. She snuggled up on the sofa, shivering. Why was it always so cold in this house? Or was it the frigid memories that haunted her?

She stared at the burgundy leather chairs that sat with their winged backs to the fireplace. They had belonged to Gary's parents and should have been discarded years ago along with the floral sofa she sat on. If only the old sofa could speak. How many nightmares would it reveal?

A bracing chill suddenly shot through her and she rubbed her arms. Vicki hadn't been living at home for over a month now. Tony talked her into moving in with him. Perhaps it was finally time to sell this old house. *But could she find a place to hide from Gary?*

Stacey yawned and glanced up at the clock. Vicki had left a message on the answering machine that she would stop over for her clothes tonight. Stacey didn't even have enough energy to check the closet to see if she'd been there. Vicki had conveniently dropped the bomb that morning that she'd stopped by St. Mary's to visit her Aunt Megan. Stacey knew Megan loved to gossip and working in the admitting area of St. Mary's always gave her plenty to gossip about. She wondered how long it would take the old busy body to broadcast the news of Vicki's new living arrangement. Especially to Gary.

At least Stacey had time to prepare before the axe would fall. Gary was out of town until next week. It didn't surprise her that Vicki had taken the easy way out. They both knew it would be Stacey who encountered Gary's wrath first. Vicki always counted on her mother to smooth out *Daddy's ruffled feathers*.

Stacey laid her head back on the sofa thankful she had a vacation day tomorrow. She'd have to reschedule her appointment with Dr. Phillips. The longer she continued therapy, the more she liked him, even if he was so blatantly honest it sometimes infuriated her. She smiled wistfully. He was such a gentle man. *Was he just as gentle with his wife?*

She suddenly bolted up, spilling cocoa down the front of her robe. Laughing at her asinine behavior, she hurried towards the kitchen for a damp sponge. *Why in the world did she care about the personal life of her doctor?*

Stacey's smile disappeared when car lights flashed through the kitchen window. She thought it was Vicki but it was Gary's voice that resonated outside the door.

"Stace, open up."

Stacey could feel the moisture trickle down her back. *This had to be coincidence. Megan just found out this afternoon and Gary was out of town.* She put on a forced smile and opened the door.

"What are you going here so late?"

Gary brushed by her and walked into the living room, stopping at the bottom of the staircase. "Get down here, girlie, I want to talk to you."

Stacey followed close behind him. "Vicki's not home. Couldn't you see her car wasn't in the driveway?"

Gary looked at his watch. "It's after eleven. Is she always out so late on a work night?"

He was obviously baiting her. Stacey's heart was pounding. "I don't keep track of her hours. She's over twenty-one."

Gary's eyes narrowed and he swerved around to face her. "So you stop being a mother just because your daughter can legally drink?"

Stacey avoided his eyes and pulled her robe tightly around her neck.

"You're talking stupid, Gary."

"Stupid am I?" Gary's eyes flashed with rage. "If anyone's stupid around here, it's you!"

Stacey's mouth went dry. *He knew. God help her, he knew.*

Before she could utter another word, his arm was anchored around her neck. "Don't lie to me, Stace. You know what happens when you lie to me."

Her insides were exploding. "Let go of me, Gary."

Gary loosened his hold but kept his arm around her neck. "Why didn't you tell me Vicki had moved in with some guy?"

Her heart was pounding, throbbing in her ears. "I promised Vicki I wouldn't tell you."

"So you were helping her deceive me?"

"No! I wanted her to tell you herself."

"Well, she told Megan last week when I was out of town!"

Stacey thought her knees were going to buckle under her. *Last week!*

"I thought she just-- I mean, Megan--" She gasped as his hand moved to cup her chin.

"Perhaps you and I haven't been seeing enough of each other. "He stroked her cheek with his thumb.

"Have you forgotten what it's like to be close to me, to be honest with me?"

No she hadn't forgotten what an animal he was. "Gary, I want you to leave."

"Why, pretty Momma, haven't you missed me?"

Her breath quickened as his hand slid down her neck and across her breast. "Don't start this again, Gary."

Gary threw her a sinister smile, but was forced to drop his hands at the sound of tires on the driveway.

Vicki burst through the front door. "Daddy! I thought that was your car," she said, throwing her arms around his neck and kissing him on the cheek. Then she glanced at Stacey's ashen face. "What's going on here?"

Gary gave Stacey a threatening stare and then scowled at Vicki. "Your mother and I were discussing your new living arrangements."

Vicki chewed on her lip and smiled nervously. "I was going to call you as soon as you got back from your trip."

"I just bet you were."

"Mom says I'm old enough to make my own decisions."

His icy stare sent shivers down Stacey's spine. "She does, does she?"

"Tony's a great guy, Daddy. You'll like him, I promise."

Gary nodded. "We'll see. I'm staying at the Holiday Inn until Sunday. I'll expect to meet this guy and form my own opinion." He strolled towards the door, glancing back over his shoulder at Stacey. "We'll talk soon -- real soon."

Stacey tried to gain her composure while Vicki watched Gary leave.

Vicki turned from the window. "What happened here tonight, Mom. You look white as a ghost."

"What happened?" Stacey was trying desperately to control her shaking. "What happened is that you lied to me!"

"I didn't! I told you I talked to Aunt Megan."

Stacey seized Vicki's shoulders. "But you didn't say it was last week! You're just like your father: leaving out important details to avoid the truth!"

"Maybe I want to be like Daddy! At least he knows how to forgive!"

"Forgive? Forgive what? It's trust he needs to work on."

Vicki jerked loose from Stacey's grasp. "Who commended you for sainthood, Mother?"

The crackling fire was the only sound that invaded the silence between them.

Finally, Vicki spoke. "Mom, I'm sorry. I need you right now."

Stacey began to rub her temples. "What is it, Victoria?"

Vicki's lip jutted out. "You always call me Victoria when you're mad at me. Can't you try to understand?"

Stacey sighed and softened her voice. "What's to understand?"

Vicki sat down on the sofa, her face paling. "I went to St. Mary's because I haven't been feeling -- for a test."

Stacey's stomach twisted in a knot. "I don't think I'm going to like this."

Vicki swallowed hard. "Mom it was an accident."

Stacey was gasping to breathe. "You're not--"

"Pregnant. The word's pregnant, Mom."

Too stunned to speak, Stacey plunked down on the sofa.

Vicki's eyes flooded with tears. "Please don't tell Daddy. I haven't even told Tony yet."

Stacey stared blankly into Vicki's eyes. "Megan. Did you tell her?"

Vicki shook her head. "Of course not. I'm not stupid, Mom."

At this point that's strictly a matter of opinion. Vicki had no idea of what she was asking, no idea of the consequences keeping a secret like this from Gary could mean.

Stacey was gagging by the time Vicki's car pulled out of the driveway. Barely making it to the bathroom, she sat retching and vomiting praying Gary wouldn't come back. Tormented, she searched her mind for a place to hide.

Why didn't she change the locks years ago?

Shuddering, she pulled herself to her feet and washed

the sweat from her face. In a daze she wandered into the bedroom. She stared at the phone for what seemed like hours but was only seconds. She could never burden Momma with the truth. She reached for her purse and pulled out Gregg Phillips' card. His phone was answered twenty-four hours a day. He said to call day or night. *But did he really mean it?*

Chapter Eleven

Duluth Later that night 1992

Gregg Phillips rubbed his eyes and poured himself another cup of coffee, attempting to relieve his pounding headache. When Stacey Walker had canceled her afternoon appointment, he decided to spend the evening reviewing her file, more and more convinced he had missed something about Gary Walker.

Did he feel a burden for Stacey because she had allowed Gary Walker to control and intimidate her for seventeen years or was it becoming something more? Almost an obsession. He found himself thinking about her day and night. Even in the early hours of dawn he would awaken and stare at the ceiling, praying for a vision to appear that would miraculously reveal a way to penetrate the barrier she had recently placed between them. It was as if they were close to a breakthrough but she was too frightened to let it happen.

When the ringing phone interrupted his thoughts, Phillips leaned back and looked at his watch. After twelve. That meant it was probably his wife. He almost wished he'd turned on the answering service. Impatiently, he picked up the phone.

"Gregg Phillips speaking."

The voice on the other end was disjointed, confused. "Dr. Phillips, I need--I mean I know it's late but--"

Phillips sat up abruptly, focusing his attention on the soft weeping voice. "Stacey, is that you?"

"I'm sorry but I --I'm so afraid."

"Where are you, Stacey?"

"I need someone." The soft weeping then turned to hysterical sobbing. "I don't know what to do if he comes back. Please -- help me."

Phillips frantically searched the file in front of him for an address. "Stacey are you at home?"

Her words were becoming disjointed again as she sobbed. "Yes -- please, he'll come back."

His mind was racing. This could be the breakthrough he was waiting for, but he couldn't make a mistake.

"Stacey, listen very carefully. I know you're upset, and I'm going to help you. I can be at your house in ten minutes. Can you hang on until I get there?"

She released a gasping sob. "Hurry, please, hurry."

Phillips flipped on the answering service and grabbed his medical bag.

Knowing the elevators were shut down, he raced down the fourteen flights of stairs circling faster and faster until he reached the door to the ramp.

He was in luck. The harbor was quiet; the Aerial Bridge was down. He floored his Mercedes, speeding across the Aerial Lift Bridge and down Park Point. He was encouraged that Stacey had enough coherence to turn on the outside light. From her previous description, it didn't take him long to find the house.

He jumped out of the car and stared at the ominous looking three-story monstrosity. The house was intimidating, even for him. He rang the bell several times before he saw the curtains move and the door opened.

Stacey was still sobbing hysterically as she fell into his arms.

He guided her to the sofa. "I'm here now, Stacey. I promise no one is going to hurt you." He opened his medical bag.

"No! No drugs! Screaming, she pushed him away. "I have to be in control!"

Phillips grabbed her hands in his and pulled her to him.

"Stacey, look at me. I promise I won't leave you. I'll stay here all night if that's what it takes."

She shook her head vigorously. "You don't understand!"

He cupped her tear-streaked face in his hand. "Stacey, I do understand. I need you to trust me. This is the only way."

"I'm afraid," she whispered.

"I know you're afraid. But you trusted me enough to call me. Now trust me enough to let me help you."

Pursing her lips to muffle her sobs, she nodded her head in agreement.

"Good," Phillips said, taking her hand and leading her to the sofa.

"Now just lay back and relax." He pulled out a syringe from his bag.

Moaning, she took a long breath. "I shouldn't have called but you said you --."

"I said I'd be here for you day or night." Phillips finished her sentence and pulled up a chair next to the sofa. "And I always keep my promises."

Phillips spoke softly. "Now, Stacey, I want you to concentrate on my voice. It is the only thing you can hear. Each word I say will bring you further and further into a deep relaxation."

She was beginning to relax. The drug was working. Her eyelids fluttered and closed.

He had no doubt who had triggered this hysteria but he had to tread carefully or even under the influence of the drug, she could erect a wall between them.

"Stacey, you're feeling very relaxed now. Can you hear my voice?"

A teardrop escaped from her eye and rolled down her face. "Make him go away forever."

"Who, Stacey?"

She turned her head as if she were looking directly at him. "You know, don't you doctor?"

"Yes, I believe I do, Stacey. But I need you to tell me."

Her eyes were tightly closed. "Everyone always leaves me. Promise you won't leave me."

Phillips reached over and took her hand. "Promise."

She turned her head, releasing a slow trembling breath; one word passed through her lips. "Gary."

Phillips continued speaking softly, each word bringing her further and further into total relaxation, closer and closer to the truth.

In this final book of the Rubies Family Saga, Gregg Phillips takes Stacey back into the past where all the sins and abuse is at last revealed. Don't miss reading all the Rubies Family Saga.

Check is out on [my authors page](#) on Amazon.com

