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60,000 Words

IN A SENSE OF LOVE

A Novel

By

Mary Jones

A Sense of Love

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You left my side to go away.
I lost my hope my sunny day.

My heart is heavy with flowing tears.
I now must find someone who cares.

I'll search the stars that shine above
and do it all for a sense of love.

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Chapter 1: (Road to Tragedy)

Tom McCalaster fought to keep his car on the narrow Texas road, as fierce downdrafts from an unexpected thunderstorm buffeted the small rental sedan. He thought about Jenny, his sixteen-year-old daughter, who was at home awaiting his arrival. He regretted having to take this new job, which took him out of town so frequently. But he had a family to support, and it was only until he could find something better, he told himself.

Then the rain hit. The fat droplets of water splattering on his windshield quickly became a deluge his wipers could barely handle. Tom pressed on the gas pedal, eager to drive out of the storm. Soon, inch deep puddles of water covered the road, causing the surface to become instantly slick under his tires.

Suddenly, his headlights caught the eyes of a deer, looming in front of him. He swerved onto the shoulder, just in time to avoid hitting it. He pulled the car back onto the road, and into a shallow layer of water that stretched from one side of the roadway to the other. Tom increased his speed, not realizing the danger. His front tires hit the water and promptly lost contact with the road. Forward momentum caused the vehicle to spin sideways, before his foot could hit the brakes.

Like a greedy dog snatching up a bone, the storm grabbed the car, pulling it off the road, spinning it once, twice, three times. With each furious revolution, Tom's head slammed hard against the doorpost. There was a shuddering impact with something solid. Tom felt his safety belt give way, and he was bounced off the driver's side door like a rag doll. Just as his head was bent at a sadistic angle, the air bag deployed, causing a kaleidoscopic of stars to explode behind his eyes. The last thing he heard, were the bones in his neck snapping, just before everything went black.

The following day, Jenny McCalaster sat on the front porch of her family's Victorian style home near San Angelo, Texas. She wore a white tank top and blue jean shorts. Her long brown hair was in a tight ponytail. With the afternoon sun blaring down on her bare shoulders, she anxiously awaited the arrival of her father.

The small, brown and white, shorthaired pup, wiggling on her lap, was not what Jenny wanted at the moment. She felt it's little claws scratching against her tanned legs. It was the first time she had ever taken the puppy outdoors, and she feared that, if she let him go, he would surely run out into the street.

Her father had given her the pup on his last trip to town. She recalled the first time she had seen the puppy. He was the

cutest little rascal. Jenny had instantly fallen in love with him. Lately, thinking of her father made her feel a bit sad. She hated the fact that his job in Dallas, kept him away from home for weeks at a time. She missed him, and the time they used to spend together. But today he was coming home, and she couldn't wait for him to arrive.

"Sit still, will you?" she demanded of the young pup, as it continue to wither and squirm in her arms. Jenny laughed at its efforts, the little dog seemed to have a mind of it's own. Finally, it nipped at Jenny's arm, causing her to release it.

"Ouch! You little monster." She bellowed, as she let go of the pup. With a feeling of frustration, she got up to go after him. "Come back here, you!" She demanded.

"Now where did you run off to?"

Spying the pup by the curb, she took off after it. Across the street she noticed her neighbor, David Thompson, standing on his front porch. The wide grin on his face, told her that he enjoyed watching her chase the little dog all over her yard. Finally, he waved and smiled at her.

"Hi Jenny. Need any help?"

"Sure. Thought you'd never ask." She replied with a refreshing laugh, feeling a little embarrassed.

She liked David a lot. He was tall, with dark hair, and had the most beautiful eyes she had ever seen. They were a vibrant turquoise, the color of the Caribbean Sea on travel posters.

However, he never seemed to pay much attention to her. They had been neighbors since she was in elementary school. But they had never been more than just friends.

Suddenly, she found herself laughing at him, as he courageously chased the loose dog around the yard. In a last attempt to retrieve the tiny animal, he almost slipped and fell on the lawn.

"Ah... Gotcha." He said with an air of triumph, as he swooped it up with a gratifying look on his face.

"Here you are, my lady." He replied, with his impersonation of an Englishman, as he handed the pup back to Jenny.

"Now don't you be letting this wee little thing get away from you again my lady."

Jenny felt the impulse to reply back in the same fashion. "But of course my lord."

They laughed at their own words. It reminded her of the times that she used to spend with her father. He was always doing impersonations for Jenny's amusement. David eyed Jenny, noticing that she was nervously watching the street.

"Expecting someone?"

"My father is coming in from a sales trip today. We have plans to go to the ball park."

"You're still trying to get on the softball team huh?"

"Yeah... and I will... make the team. I just need more practice, that's all."

"Well, good luck."

"Thanks. I think I'll need it."

"Cute little rascal, isn't he?" He gently scratched the puppy behind its ear, getting a wagging tail as his reward.

"When did you get him?"

"Uh...?"

"Hello... Jenny. Are you there?" He asked, waving his hand in front of her face, laughing at her lack of attention.

"I said... When did you get the dog?"

"Oh, my dad got him for me last time he was in town."

"Cute little guy. What's his name?"

"Buster," she said, smiling down at the puppy in her arms.

"So, why the name Buster?"

"Oh... I don't know. Maybe because he reminds me of those hush puppy dogs in the shoe commercials," she said, with laughter in her voice.

"Well, he certainly does at that." David said, noticing that Buster did resemble the dog in the Hush Puppy shoes ads. The large brown spots showed well against the dog's clean white coat. He also had long floppy ears, and brown eyes that were bright with excitement.

"So, are you planning on going to the school dance next weekend?" He asked rather nervously. It had taken him all week just to get up the nerve to ask her, and this was his perfect opportunity.

"Well, I don't know. I really haven't even thought about it. I doubt I'll be going." And it was true. She had been thinking of her father's arrival all week. The dance had completely slipped her mind. *He must think I'm pretty dense, to have forgotten our school dance.* She thought to herself, as she suddenly felt a bit stupid in front of him.

"Oh..."

Was that a sound of disappointment she heard from him? Had he planned on asking her? Suddenly she felt her heart jump, as if it had done a summersault in her chest.

"Of course, that's only because I haven't been asked," she said with a slight smile. She was actually flirting. She couldn't believe it. Her heart was fluttering, her palms a little damp. She wondered if he would ask her to the dance, now that he knew she was available.

"Hmmm... Well then, I guess we could always go together, seeing that you don't have a date yet." He said rather sheepishly, but also feeling rather proud at the moment.

"Oh... are you asking me... to the dance?" She said, trying to sound as innocent as she could, not wanting to give away her excitement.

"Well... will you, Jenny McCalaster, accompany me to the school dance, please?" He said with an arm gesture, as he bowed down to her, making her laugh at his silly antics.

"Of course... I'd be honored." She replied with a big smile, as she curtsied toward him, causing them both to break out in a string of laughter.

Inside the house, Joan McCalaster, a slender blonde woman in her early thirties was vacuuming. When suddenly, the telephone started to ring. Turning off the vacuum, she reluctantly walked over to answer it.

"Hello?"

"Hello," replied the voice of a man at the other end.

"I need to speak to Mrs. Thomas McCalaster. Is this Mrs. McCalaster I'm speaking to?"

"Yes, this is she."

"Ma'am..." there was a short pause in his voice, causing an instant chill to run through her.

"What is it?"

"Ma'am...this is Officer Wilson. I'm sorry to inform you, that Thomas McCalaster has been in an automobile accident. State Troopers found him about 6:00 AM this morning. The driver's license identified the victim as your husband, Thomas Ray McCalaster of 2905 Pecos Drive."

"What...? An accident? What do you mean an accident? Is he okay? Is he in the hospital? Please tell me something." She demanded, as raw fear ran through her body.

"I'm sorry ma'am. But the State Troopers, who found him, said that he was already presumed dead when they arrived at the scene. It appears he lost control of his vehicle and ran off the road, hitting a tree. The impact must have killed him instantly."

"I see...."

"Ma'am. We're going to need you to come down to the station and collect his personal items and to make a positive identification of him as your husband."

She felt a chill run through her, vaguely registering what the officer was saying. The telephone felt cold in her hand. Her mind was suddenly blank. It was as though she was unable to speak.

"Hello...? Ma'am...? Are you still there?"

"Yes... I'm here. I understand. Thank you officer.... Good-bye."

Slowly she hung up the telephone. Like a robot, she turned and walked toward the front door. Suddenly she felt lost. What was she going to tell Jenny? Joan watched her now, outside, playing with Buster, waiting for her father to arrive. How was she going to explain, that her father was never coming home? Tears welled up in her eyes. She knew how much Jenny loved her father. She would take it hard. Jenny was not her own daughter, yet she had loved her as if she had been her own child. She had helped Jenny's father raise her since she was a child.

She never met Jenny's natural mother, who now lived somewhere in Brooklyn, New York. Tom never talked much about her. The only thing she knew of Jenny's mother, was that she had been heavily into drugs, when Jenny was a small child. Tom had been forced to take Jenny away from her because she had been unable to care for their child. A few times, he had received letters asking for money, but never a word about their daughter Jenny. She remembered how Tom had become angry, tossing the letter into the desk drawer. Jenny had never asked about her real mother, but Joan knew she must have wanted to. Would she now? She wondered, as she watched the young girl sitting out on the front lawn, playing with the floppy eared puppy.

Suddenly, a small cry from the other room startled Joan from her thoughts. Little Billy was awakening from his nap. Motherly instinct took over and she went to tend to the crying baby. As she looked down at the whimpering child, emotions filled her, and she burst out crying, no longer able to hold back the pain. Her heart felt heavy with remorse at the thought of this child growing up without a father. The small child had quickly fallen back to sleep in the comfort of her arms. It did not seem fair, she thought to herself, but is it ever?

Out in the yard, Jenny was starting to get hot and tired.

"Hey you." She called to the pup, as she scooped him up in her arms. "Want to go get something to drink? Looks like Dads going to be late."

Reluctantly, she made her way to the front porch and opened the door. She could hear a woman crying and wondered what was wrong. She set Buster down on the floor and watched as he scampered off toward the kitchen. Then she went to find the sound, which seemed to be coming from the nursery.

Unaware that Jenny was at the door of the nursery, Mrs. McCalaster continued to weep uncontrollably. Billy was in her arms, content with a bottle.

"Mom...? What's wrong?" Jenny asked with concern.

"Jenny...?" replied Joan, in a weary tone of voice.

"Mom? What's wrong?"

"Jenny, honey. It's your father. He's been in an accident."

"What? What do you mean an accident? When? Where? Is he okay? I need to go to him."

"Jenny, listen to me. You can't go to him. He isn't in a hospital. When the troopers found him, they were too late."

"What are you telling me? That my daddy is dead? No! It can't be true. You're lying." She cried in despair, as she desperately tried to comprehend what her stepmother had just told her. It felt like she was in a bad dream, unable to wake-up, unable to control it's outcome.

"Please tell me this isn't true," she pleaded, as she slowly sank down to the floor. Her body racked with sobbing tears at the lost of her father.

"Jenny...? They need me to go down to the station. Will you be okay?" She said with concern, not at all sure if she should leave the young girl alone. Yet, she could not take her to the police station either. Someone needed to stay at the house incase the phone rang again. She wanted to comfort Jenny, but was unable to bring herself to do so. She was hurting as well. She could only watch in grief as the young girl slumped on the floor wracked with anguish.

"How did it happen? Do you even know?" Jenny suddenly asked, with a harsh tone in her voice. Tears spilled down her cheeks, as she tried desperately to wipe them away with the back of her hand.

"Jenny? What do you mean?" She knew the girl would be hurt, but she never expected Jenny to blame her. This was a side of Jenny she had never seen. It left her confused.

"Jenny, They didn't tell me exactly what happened."

"What do you mean? They didn't tell you? Didn't you even bother to ask? God, you make me sick. I hate you." She yelled with frustration, as she ran out of the room. Joan was left standing alone, concerned and confused over Jenny's reaction. Her words had hurt. But, she knew the girl had said them out of the pain

she felt over the loss of her father. Jenny needed to be alone now.

"Waaaaaa.... Waaaaaa!" The small child was now demanding his attention it seemed, as he squirmed in Joan's arms. He did not like being wakened by all of the yelling.

"Hush...Hush... sweetie. It's okay." She said, trying to comfort the child as best she could. She put a few of his things in a travel bag. Then, she grabbed her purse off the kitchen table and reluctantly left the house. She had to get this over with. Already she felt the beginnings of a migraine headache, which was sure to last for the rest of the day.

Chapter 2: (The Argument)

After looking around for the first time in days, Jenny supposed she was pathetic. Flowers, wilted and brown, lay scattered on the floor of her room, where she had thrown them. A cold pizza and a glass of juice sat on the nightstand, untouched. Her appetite had been absent since she had been told that her father had died. She rubbed her eyes forcing herself awake. How long had she slept? She couldn't remember. All she knew was that the pain hadn't gone away. Hadn't eased one bit. She was still paralyzed by the loss of her father.

"Whatever shall I do without you daddy?" she asked wearily. Suddenly, her eyes filled with tears. She wept for what seemed like hours. She wondered if the pain would ever go away.

The funeral had come and gone. She vaguely remembered being there. It was as though she had been watching a television movie. Only she was in it. Her heart was heavy, like a great stone had been placed upon it. She remembered people trying to comfort and console her. She remembered how some had whispered and glanced towards her. It was obvious that they were discussing her. She remembered how it had made her angry at the time. Especially when she saw them acting as if her father's

death was a very casual thing, laughing and reminiscing about old times. One would have thought that they were at a party, the way they had carried on.

"Damn them!" Jenny said, with the images still clear to her mind, renewing fresh anger within her.

"How dare they act so casually over my father's death. I hope I never see them again," her voice sounding as cold as ice. Anger and frustration threaten to overtake her again. Reaching for a tissue, she wiped her eyes, and tried desperately to stop the endless flow of tears.

"Oh God.... Please help me." She pleaded out loud, as she looked up toward the heavens. She knew she had to stop crying. It only made things worse. Forcing herself to get up, she walked aimlessly to the bathroom to wash her face. "Perhaps a long bath will help me relax." She needed to think of her life. Will she continue to live here? Will her stepmother still want her here? She had not thought about it until now. "Oh God. What if she doesn't want me here anymore?" She questioned herself out loud. The thought was weighing heavily on her mind.

An hour later, Jenny came out of the bathroom and found her stepmother waiting for her in the kitchen. Joan had been fixing lunch. She had heard her stepdaughter waking up, and knew she had not eaten the day before. She worried about Jenny. She knew the death of her father had been devastating for her. However, with her not eating, it worried her even more. She recalled how

Jenny had been cold towards her at the funeral. Did she really blame her for Tom's death? Will she want to leave now and go to her natural mother? She knew if she did, she couldn't stop her. Jenny was sixteen years old. She had a right to know about her real mother. Joan was her legal stepmother. But, all she could do was plead with Jenny, and hope she could talk her out of leaving.

"Oh my Jenny. What will I do without you?" She asked herself with a weary sigh.

"What time is it?"

Joan was startled for a moment. She had not heard Jenny walk in. How long had she been lost in her thoughts? She wondered to herself.

"One O'clock in the afternoon sweetie. How do you feel? Are you hungry?"

"A little I guess," she replied with a soft voice.

"Well here... Sit down," Joan gestured toward the table.

"Would you like something to drink? Milk or juice maybe?"

"It doesn't matter," replied Jenny with a weary sigh.

"Well then. I'll get you some milk. It will make you feel much better." She said, as she opened the refrigerator to get the milk.

"Where's Billy? Is he asleep?" Jenny asked with curiosity, as she suddenly noticed that her little brother was not in his highchair, as usual during this time of day.

"No. He's at your Aunt Martha's. She offered to keep him today, so we could have a chance to talk." Joan replied, as she looked at her stepdaughter with concern.

"About what? What is there to talk about? My father...?" She said, with a renewed anger. The feeling was like a white-hot fever burning inside her. Jenny made herself shrug, and silence filled the room.

"I'm sorry about the loss of your father, Jenny. But you can't keep this hurt pent up inside of you. Lashing out at me is not going to make it go away. I worry about you. You're still my daughter."

As soon as the words were out, she regretted them. The look on Jenny's face told her that it had been a mistake to say she was her daughter.

"Your daughter? I am NOT your daughter, and I never will be! Don't you dare call me your daughter!" she replied with sour vengeance. The harshness of her words where like a slap to the face. Joan could only stare at her in awe. This was not the sweet young girl she thought she knew so well. The anger she now saw in her was not at all what she had expected. It worried her deeply.

"My father is the only family I had here. You are not my mother and you never will be. I know I have a real mother out there, and I will find her. She's my only real family now. The only reason my father married you, was because you got pregnant.

You trapped him into marriage. Didn't you? You probably never even loved him!" Jenny shouted at her stepmother.

The sudden slap to Jenny's face had taken her by surprise. She drew her hand to the now injured spot and was stunned. It was the first time she had ever been hit by her stepmother.

"You're right Jenny. I'm not your biological mother, and I never will be. Nevertheless, I have raised you along with your father ever since you were a very little girl. And I have always been there for you. I have been a mother to you in every possible way. Moreover, I have always loved you as my very own daughter. And in my heart, as far as I'm concerned, you will always be my daughter. If you can't handle how I feel, well I'm sorry, because that's how it is."

The impact of Joan's words where more hurtful then she had intended them to be. But Jenny's words had also hurt, and had caused anger to build within her. Already, she could feel the threat of fresh tears starting to emerge.

Unable to hold her feelings, Joan ran out of the room. Jenny was left standing in shock. But Jenny had seen the pain in her stepmother's eyes. A pain that she knew she had caused. Slumping down in a chair, she cried with renewed grief. The reality of her stepmother's words, hit her with an impact that she was not prepared for. Jenny had lashed out on purpose, with intention to hurt. But in reality, she blamed herself for her father's death. The idea of it had been eating away at the pit of her stomach.

She knew now what she must do. She needed to go to her stepmother, and try to make things right.

Wiping away the tears with the back of her hand, she went to find her stepmother. Jenny hoped that she would be forgiven for her harsh words and rudeness. Deep down, Jenny knew they both needed each other.

Hot tears cascaded down her cheeks. She felt the guilt of her actions toward her stepmother. She hadn't really intended to hurt her. These feelings confused her. In reality, she loved her stepmother. But what if she doesn't forgive me? It had been selfish to lash out at her stepmother. It was completely out of character. Her limbs felt robotic as she went to the bathroom and washed her face. She wet a washcloth for her stepmother and then went to her. Joan was sitting on her bed, with her hands covering her face. Jenny could hear her crying, and suddenly she felt like a great weight was being placed on her chest.

"Mom, I'm sorry." Jenny said in a low voice as she laid her hand on her stepmother's shoulder and placed the washcloth on her forehead.

"Are you okay?"

With a small snuffle, Joan nodded her head, "Yes."

"Mom, I'm sorry I don't know why I said all those awful things to you. I didn't mean to upset you."

Sensing Jenny's pain, she understood why the girl had said the things she had. She knew that Jenny hadn't really meant to hurt

her. Seeing the fresh tears in the young girl's eyes, she placed her arm around Jenny's shoulder to comfort her. "Everything will be okay Jenny, you'll see."

For a moment it seemed as if time stood still, as they sat in silence. Each was lost in their thoughts. There was no need for words. Jenny looked at her stepmother, and suddenly, it was as if she was seeing her for the first time, a woman with great strength.

She let her eyes roam around the room. They fixed on a photo of her father, still sitting on the nightstand. In a quiet, barely audible voice, she spoke to no one in particular.

"I'm gonna miss you daddy."

Not even her stepmother had heard, as she sat beside her, lost in a time of her own past memories. She looked so lost. It was clear to Jenny, that they needed each other right now.