

## “A Broken Promise”

### Chapter 1

An ominous rumble sounded in the sky. Thick dark clouds started to release rain, but Grace Goodrich continued to vent her anger by furiously clipping at the hedges around her home while she sobbed unmindful of the rain.

Her next door neighbor, Cynthia Gilbert, saw Grace through the kitchen window while she was drying her lunch dishes. It crossed her mind that she might be of some help to her younger friend.

So, grabbing a towel and an umbrella, she went out the back door to her friend working at the hedge. “What’s the matter, Grace? Why are you so upset?”

“Cynthia, I don’t understand what’s happening around here anymore. Six months ago, my husband told me he’d arranged with the travel agency to book us a trip to Paris two months after he retired. But now...George isn’t taking me!”

“Is he taking someone else?”

“The travel agent called George today. After they spoke, I was shocked to hear George say “Get ready to pack our things. I’ll be driving us over to see the ‘Hot Air Balloon Festival’ in Albuquerque, New Mexico as soon as the agent mails me the tickets. At my age, I can’t be too far from my doctor.”

“What about Paris?” I asked him.

He said, “I want to see the ‘Hot Air Balloon Festival’ in Albuquerque. At my age, I don’t want to be too far from my doctor.”

Grace's lower lip trembled and she blubbered, "George has never broken a promise to me. He knows how much I've always wanted to go to Paris. After that, Cynthia handed Grace the towel and said, "Come into my kitchen and I'll make us some tea."

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Grace sat at the table wiping herself dry. "The Paris trip would've been the honeymoon we couldn't afford when we got married."

"Grace, you're very disappointed George broke his promise."

Cynthia, I was stunned. You know I get tongue-tied when I'm upset, and then I can't argue. I always try to avoid scenes and angry words. What can I say to my husband about his sudden change of mind?"

"Grace dear, last week you told me that George was going to see his doctor. Did he learn something about his health that he hasn't yet told you? It might explain why George has been constantly repeating himself lately."

"Cynthia, you're right. George has been acting oddly. Three weeks ago he moved into our daughter's vacated bedroom."

"Is that the reason why you've been looking so unhappy?"

"Cynthia, I thought then that George was cheating on me with a younger woman. I was angry, hurt and ready to divorce him. So, I hired a detective to follow him."

"Good grief, Grace. I'm so sorry to hear that. What did he find out?"

“The detective reported to me that there was no ‘other woman’ in my husband’s life. I was very glad to hear it, but really quite surprised. I began to wonder if my wrinkled aging body was now as disgusting to my husband to see as it is to me.”

“Grace, you’re a beautiful woman! You should be proud of how good you look. What a heavy burden you’ve been carrying around. Why do you always assume things? (sigh) Get the facts. Instead of punishing yourself, ask George why he moved out.”

“Cynthia, men look more distinguished as they age, but women just look older. I’m afraid to lose what’s left of my pride if I hear George agree with what I’m thinking.”

“Well, your handsome husband doesn’t look like seventy two; the mandatory age to be retired from his company. But Grace, you look wonderful for your age.”

“You really think so? My ego won’t allow me to ask George why he chose to leave our bedroom. I’ve been holding onto my pride by assuming he’s punishing me for failing to keep our daughter from running off two months ago with Dallas. That lanky unemployed cowboy, George, thought unworthy of Linda, the ‘apple of his eye.’”

Cynthia could see Grace was terribly upset, and was wondering if she’d even heard what she’d asked her? So, she repeated it. “Grace, you told me George was going to see his doctor. Did he learn something about his health that he hasn’t yet told you? It might explain why he’s been acting lost and is constantly repeating himself.”

“Oh, dear me,” Grace said. Do you think George has a brain tumor or something like that?”

Grace dear, please stop assuming you know the answers to things before you even ask the questions and get the facts. Please try not to jump to conclusions to avoid a confrontation. I’ll watch over your house while you’re gone. Enjoy your trip to Albuquerque, I hope nothing is radically wrong with George when he reveals the results of his medical condition to you.”

“Cynthia, thank you for helping me to realize there may be a bigger problem here than George breaking a promise to me. This morning he confused my tube of moisturizer for his tube of toothpaste.”

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Grace dried off the shears and put them back in the shed. After that, she hurried to her bedroom to change out of her wet clothes. Seated at her French-styled blue mirrored vanity, she vividly recalled the night she tried to “talk sense” into her daughter. However, Linda was stubborn just like her father and she hadn’t been able to convince her daughter to wait until she graduated high school before she left home.

Grace wiped a tear from her eye. She missed Linda and her son, Barry.

Those two had always been devoted to one another; yet as different as night and day. Barry was a frail, studious fellow who was never in trouble while Linda was excellent in athletics, beautiful, but not smart, and always in some kind of trouble. (sigh)

Linda was nothing like she was as a young girl. She'd always obeyed whatever her mother taught her. "Don't ask questions and do as you're told!"

Suddenly, Grace wondered why George hadn't talked to Linda himself. Why had he asked her to do it? George was the star salesman at his company. She always did as she was told to do by her parents and then by her husband.

George should've been the one to speak to Linda, and not have asked me to do it... Grace said to her reflection in the mirror.

After that, she opened her makeup drawers and started to fix her face. When she was satisfied with her appearance, she reached into another drawer for the diary her busy and successful lawyer son had sent her after she'd complained to him that she missed talking with him.

It seemed like she was with him whenever she used it. It often helped her to sort out her thoughts.

Dear Diary,

I'll go with George to see the hot air balloons, but on the condition that we go to Paris, France on our next trip. I miss cuddling with my husband. At least we'll be back in the same bedroom.

I won't bring up the subject of Linda leaving home. What's done is done. Like mama used to say, "Don't stir up the sh-t after it settles."

Grace, still, could not understand why only six months ago George was *so* excited about arranging their trip to Paris. What could he have learned from his doctor that he hasn't told me?

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The following morning, Grace wrote:

Dear Diary,

It was amusing the first time George brushed his teeth with my moisturizer, but he continues to do it. Also, he's repeating himself even more now. George still works out each day and looks very fit. It must be very hard for him to be forced to retire from a good job that he enjoyed doing... but that's his company's policy.

She gave her hair a last sweep with her brush and asked her reflection, "Why is it that men look more distinguished as they age, but women just look older?"

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Dear Diary,

Today, I parked in the driveway and beeped the horn as usual to signal George to come out and help me. However, he didn't come out. Then, I thought he might've fallen asleep again, and so I leaned on the horn longer. Still no George. After that, I wondered if he might be ill?

Alarmed, I grabbed the package filled with the frozen foods and hurried inside. There was George watching a baseball game seated at the kitchen table.

Of course I was relieved, but nevertheless I complained to him, “George, I need your help getting the rest of the packages from the car.”

Immediately, he turned off the television while telling me, “The millionaire on second base threw the ball to the millionaire on first base, but he missed catching it. So, the multi-millionaire on the other team made the winning home run.” Can George be losing his hearing?

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Dear Diary,

Today, George handed me the sealed envelope that arrived from the travel agency with the hot air balloon festival tickets for the opening show on Saturday. He’ll be driving our Buick south to Route 66 from Chicago, and then we’ll go west to Albuquerque, New Mexico. I’ve already packed my sexiest nightgown.

## Chapter 2

The scenic drive was interesting until we reached Route 66. After that, there were miles and miles of long stretches of the same dying grass and low mountains on both sides of the road. She tried several times to engage George in conversation, but he insisted that he needed to concentrate on driving the car.

Grace looked out the car window and pondered on the fact that she was now with her beloved husband twenty-four hours a day, yet she'd never felt this lonely in all the forty years they'd been married.

It seemed a lot longer to her than three months since his retirement luncheon. George no longer patted or pinched her behind. His disposition had deteriorated from sweet and cheerful to downright grumpy. Nowadays, they barely speak.

Grace withdrew a cigarette from her purse and lit it while staring at the stubble on her husband's face with disgust. He'd told her yesterday that he was going to grow a beard. She wondered if it was his way of celebrating his retirement. I'll miss seeing my handsome, clean-shaven husband she thought.

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George sneaked another look at the shapely blonde beside him. He didn't know why the woman was with him, but he was glad to have her company. "Can you find us some music on the radio?" he asked.

The woman leaned forward to turn on the radio and search for a satisfactory station. And George enjoyed peeking down her blouse while she did it.

“Must you always be switching stations?” he asked.

She leaned forward again and turned off the radio while thinking *there's just no pleasing that man any more*. Then, she crushed out her cigarette in the tray and opened the window, but George asked her to close it.

Despite the air conditioner being on, Grace was warm, but she closed it. She assumed George *didn't care if she needed to fan herself to feel comfortable*. Sigh. *What's he keeping from me about his health report?* she wondered.

*It must be responsible for his drastic change in attitude*. He no longer says my name. It makes me feel like he doesn't even want to remember that I'm still his wife.

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George steered the car to the vacant pump in a gas station at the side of the road. While he was pumping gas, Grace searched to find a pleasant music station.

At his farewell luncheon, her husband was given a GPS accessory, but George became upset with it as soon as he realized he'd have to listen to a female voice giving him the travel directions. Grace opened her purse and pulled out another cigarette and her diary.

Dear Diary,

George doesn't like to use his GPS anymore. He had named it “Gypsy.” He bickered with it whenever he used it, and often disengaged it if it said, “recalculating” more than twice.

At first, I thought his behavior with Gypsy was hilarious until he angrily accused me of laughing at his ineptness. Friends

had warned me it might take George a while to adjust to retirement, but I thought they were teasing me.

I refused to believe he'd suffer from the "retirement blues." Could it be that or is it something else? When will George share his medical news with me?

For over forty years, I looked forward to my husband's retirement, a time when I wouldn't be playing second fiddle to his job. However, I never anticipated that we'd be getting on one another's nerves. I'm hoping he'll get the hang of not working soon. I miss having a pleasant companion. It's no fun to be with this grumpy old man that my dear husband has become.

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George returned to the car and said, "I'm hungry. The cashier told me there's a nice place to eat three miles up the next side road. I want to eat. I don't want the car to overheat."

Grace thought, *Well, I'm glad to hear he's being considerate of something else beside himself.*