

EVERYTHING'S A TWO-STEP BUT A WALTZ:

The Reluctant Texan Comes Home

By Chick Morgan

BOOK EXCERPTS

Chapter 1

Later that night, sitting at the tacky bar in that tacky restaurant, I knocked back cheap cabernet glass after glass. I knew I needed to talk to my best friend. I texted, and the return text was immediate: "Don't do anything. Don't go anywhere. I am calling you now." After a few seconds the call from Jamaica came and I sat there for an hour sobbing and drinking and wailing with no one else around but the nervous looking bartender. Wailing. For whom? My mother? Myself? I didn't know, didn't care, and it didn't matter. His words were echoing in my mind: *If I only have fifteen more years...Not with you... If I only have...If only...*

The few other late-night customers that had been at the Red Lobster bar quietly settled up with the bartender and made their exit. I was such a nasty, noisy, snotty mess I had cleared the room. I would have left as well, but I was bolted to the wooden barstool, clutching my purse like a sinking ship's life preserver to make sure it didn't touch the dirty, napkin strewn floor. It was just me, the bartender now keeping a cautious distance, and my "lifeline call a friend" friend. Wine slopped out of one of the chugged glasses and worked its way up from the sticky, grimy counter to the cuff of my expensive ivory silk blouse, spreading like an oozing blood stain.

Chapter 2

Shortly after moving into our soon to be showcase on the hill, our own veritable Manor, we learned the Town had a Transfer Station. Any other town would have called it a *dump* but the very idea of anything as low class and ordinary as a dump existing in this picture-perfect Connecticut setting sent a collective shudder town-wide through all the Armani shoulder pads right down to the Guccis and Manolo Blahniks. Best of all, there was no charge for day-to-day trash and garbage deposits of the sort that the local trash carting company regularly picked up for a fee. We decided to give the Transfer Station a try. The drive from our home to the Transfer Station was beautiful and peaceful, especially in the early morning sunlight which was when we drove it. We looked forward to the time together at the start of the day. We brewed fresh coffee to take along with us in our identical and individually labeled insulated coffee mugs. We referred to these drives as our "Dump Dates." It was a happy time for us. We felt fortunate to be together and deeply content.

Chapter 4

I realized over the coming months each space I was privileged to visit and stay in offered me a place of beauty from which to meditate, sit, read, and drink my morning coffee out of a special mug. In my Easton, Connecticut home, that space had been a small jewel of a deck right off my bedroom, the Juliet Balcony my friends call it. It was on that deck with the first cup of steaming coffee when the precious early light of dawn seeped into the bedroom I enjoyed the coziness of the balcony and the view over lovely Bradford pear trees in their full white dress, artisanal red and white heritage roses, pink azaleas, amethyst rhododendrons, and lush lawn. It was on that deck I experienced the continuity of place off and on over months as I watched the terrible winter of sadness evolve into the spring of renewal and rebirth. It didn't strike me until many months later that my favorite mug I chose each early morning in their kitchen was from The Mercy Center, an organization my friend was committed to, devoting many hours tutoring math to adult women preparing for their GED. My time there, and in their friendship and care, was a Mercy Center of its own.

Chapter 11

There would be no more getting to the cabaret club on a late afternoon or early evening of performance day, Don't Tell Mama, The Duplex, or best of all, The Metropolitan Room. I'd descend into what was usually a pretty dreadful "green room," on ancient steep and narrow musty stone steps with a tiny dressing room at the bottom. Waiters carrying trays of drinks, appetizers, or entrees for the restaurant next door charged back and forth and up and down the same stairs as well. One so-called dressing room was nothing more than a curtain hung on a clothesline in a corner of the back area of the club, reminiscent of the Clark Gable fixture in *It Happened One Night*. The Metropolitan Room! Oh, the Metropolitan Room dressing room, a true dressing room with a three-way mirror, a sign on the door with an actual star on it, and my name. However grand or humble the circumstances, I would emerge, dressed in a sequined evening gown and earrings that brushed my neck, hair perfect, slipping on at the last minute my four-inch heel Bruno Magli black peau de soie evening shoes, listening to the murmur of the crowd at the tables talking to each other and sipping the first of their "two-drink minimum." The lights would dim. Waiting in the dark, I would be announced: "Ladies and Gentlemen, Don't Tell Mama/The Metropolitan Room/The Duplex is proud to present: Morgan!"

Chapter 12

The initial sting of events earlier in the year had begun to subside some. My travels had been healing, providing an abundance of time for thought, reflection, and looking forward. I still hated the very idea of Texas, but maybe I could carve out a little space here that could work until the next “next step” materialized. It looked pleasant enough, and, actually, more than pleasant – quaint to the point of having been delivered right out of central casting for a picturesque Texas town, complete with town characters, town rumors, and an interesting old west history. It was also quite the going concern made up with a heartbeat of artists and musicians of every stripe. Original old limestone buildings housed a couple stores, small galleries, a few eateries, all of the buildings hiding a history of whatever they were before – grain stores, a gas station, a small church or two. In no way did this little town look run down and beat up, but curiously, at the same time, it did not seem trendy or trying too hard to be cute and authentic. I would learn over the next few years that singer songwriters and musicians of state and national renown lived quietly in the hills, never far from the Town Square. Some summer mornings I would find one of them sitting quietly with their coffee, reading the Wimberley View in the Wimberley Cafe, minding their own business and others minding theirs as well, sometimes having just dropped their children off at school. Newcomers to Wimberley and even some old timers describe the town as “magical.” I would say it’s magical, yes, and more importantly, mystical. There are some good reasons to think so.