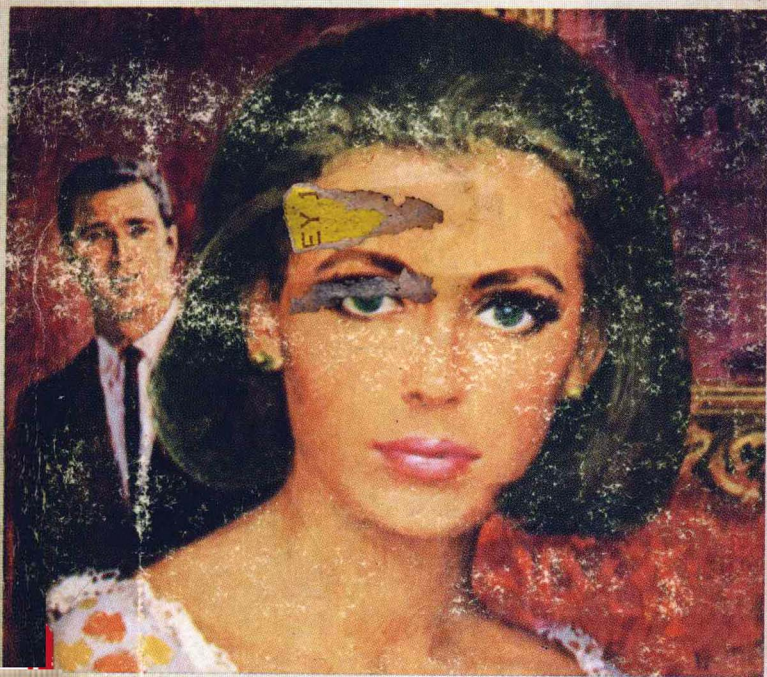


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# Love's Legacy



*love story by Betty Blockling*

Hastily Cindy went toward the nearest window to cut off the sound of the quarreling; to silence Mary's high, shrill voice. But she overheard their conversation anyway.

*"Father obviously caught Kurt and Anne together. He forgot the rest of us in his will to punish her."*

*"Kurt?" Jim's voice was derisive. "How about Ross? He's been trying to shake Cindy since the first news of Cyrus' disappearance. And stop yapping about his being too young. Anne and Ross are closer in age than Ross and Cindy. After living with the old man for fourteen years, Anne wants a change."*

Cindy didn't lose the window. She backed away from it, stunned. Ross and Anne! *Her* Ross!



# Love's Legacy

*A love story by  
Betty Blocklinger*

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# 1

*Cindy Slater* paused for a final glance in the mirror. In her ears, rang her sister *Jemalee's* irritable: "For goodness' sake, *Cindy*, look the part. One frump in the family is enough."

She had referred to their married sister, *Mary Wardman*. *Mary* was so busy keeping her husband, *Jim*, the perfect representative of *Slater Enterprises*, she hadn't time for herself.

But look what part? A girl now free to marry *Ross Jones*? A girl about to have a quarter of a million dollars handed to her? Or a girl grieving over the death of her father?

She had been cheated of normal grief. For months she, the family and her father's business associates had lived under tension. First had come the shock of her father, *Cyrus Slater*, being reported missing on a deer-hunting trip in *Oregon*, then the interminable wait as every type of search was carried on.

Winter snows had fallen and finally thawed, and still they had waited until a week ago when the tension had ended.

A prospector, working his way in under a cliff where he believed cinnabar might be found, had found something giving him more immediate returns: the reward for finding the body of the millionaire *Cyrus Slater*.

After so many months it had been difficult to grieve even at yesterday's travesty of a funeral.

Ross would be glad the waiting was over. Being a junior executive in her father's business hadn't been easy. Cyrus Slater had never relaxed his tight grip on the business reins. Now Ross could develop the many ideas he had. Anne, Cindy's comparatively young stepmother, would back him; Anne, who knew nearly as much about Slater Enterprises as Cyrus who'd founded it.

Cindy stared at the mirror. She looked the same as usual: medium height, medium coloring, with neither Mary's fairness nor Jemalee's striking brunette beauty.

Oh, well, Ross loved her as she was. He'd said so a hundred times.

Cindy stepped out on the gallery which ran above the great entrance hall. Anne and Ross were below in earnest conference.

That was good. Cindy, of the three girls, was the only one who hadn't resented her father marrying his secretary so soon after their mother's death. She'd been eight at the time.

Now that she, Cindy, was twenty-two and deeply in love, she could better understand the Anne who had married Cyrus when she was twenty-four. Even at fifty Cyrus must have seemed glamorous to a girl who had known nothing but want in her childhood.

"Hi," Cindy called down, and wondered at their startled reaction. Anne dropped her hands from Ross's coat sleeve; Ross straightened his shoulders as though in defense.

"You look beautiful," Cindy called as she ran down the steps. Anne had obviously followed Jemalee's advice. From the top of her copper-toned head

to the spike heels of her slippers, Anne epitomized the wealthy young widow.

"What kept you so long?" Anne asked. "You know we want to get this over so we can—" She broke off, and Cindy wondered if she'd almost said, "start living."

"Let's get on with it." Ross put a hand under the elbow of each and propelled them gently to the library, saying, "Everyone else is here, even Krohn's senior partner. Kurt probably feels anyone so close to the family socially shouldn't be the one to read the will."

Oh yes, the will; the golden key which would open the doors to freedom for all of them.

Cindy wondered why she didn't resent the thought. She had loved her father. There had been times when she believed she was the only one who did. Yet she conceded it had been his own fault. He had held them off.

She readily agreed with the others that he kept too close a grip on the family purse strings. Not that he wasn't generous; merely that he always earmarked the use of any monies beyond their usual allowance.

Ross seated Anne first, naturally, and Cindy gravitated to a chair apart from the others. She thought no more of this than they. She liked being apart, being able to watch and observe. She had saved herself many a heartache through watching rather than listening to the words of others.

She looked at Ross. This will, this golden key, meant they could go on with their marriage. Ross, out of all her friends, was the only one her father had approved. How wise he had been and how silly she had been two years ago when she'd thought him



too old. Ah, well, a few months of growing up had revealed her mistake.

He was so good-looking and so assured one would feel safe in his life or in his arms.

Someone shifted. Kurt Krohn, her father's legal advisor, the one man to whom Cyrus would listen.

Kurt had practically lived at the Slater home since Cyrus had disappeared. They were all indebted to him for his wisdom during the trying months. Had his hair grown whiter, his eyes darker? How distinguished he looked.

As soon as she and Ross were settled in their home, they would give a dinner and introduce Kurt to her friend Margaret's mother. They'd make an ideal couple. Kurt was wasted as a bachelor.

Jemalee flounced in, irritated at the delay. Cindy shivered a little. She could picture Jemalee with thousands of dollars to spend. She'd cut a swath from the west coast to the Riviera. She hadn't cut too narrow a path before their father's death, and now, with no restraining hand—

Jim Wardman cleared his throat, and Cindy switched her gaze. Jim was an important cog in Slater Enterprises, but she knew her brother-in-law had dreams of creating a kingdom of his own, once his wife had the money to finance its inception.

Mary would give him all she had. She sat now, looking up at him, anxious, adoring.

"If you don't mind, Mr. Crider," Jim's voice boomed out, "I have an appointment with an important Slater client in an hour."

Cindy settled back in her deep chair. Maybe she should have worn her new gold cotton corduroy. She literally faded into the background.

Dimly she listened to the legal phraseology of the introduction. Krohn's partner, Cal Crider, had a

brittle voice. It was like a tiny, sharp hatchet chopping off words.

A gasp went up. Cindy straightened. What had she missed? She'd heard what she had expected to hear: bequests to faithful employees and to loyal servants; the balance to be equally divided between Cyrus' widow Anne and his three daughters.

"Will you repeat that?" rasped Jim Wardman.

Kurt Krohn shifted, and Cindy saw a look of suppressed triumph on his face.

Obediently Crider was repeating the phrase.

"Distribution of the above not to be made until the demise of my wife (widow) Anne Burnett Slater."

Cindy looked quickly at Ross. She relaxed. He didn't seem disturbed. Didn't that prove he loved her for herself, not for the money she might bring to their marriage?

Jim Wardman was talking angrily, his face red.

"If I may have quiet," Crider said sharply, "there is another phrase here."

Quiet fell like a pall, and into it came the next words: "Or her remarriage, the act of which will invalidate any bequest to her."

Cindy's gaze swung. What on earth had happened to Ross? Why, he looked as shocked as Jemalee had sounded. And Kurt was rising as though his stance would give force to his protest.

"That is not the true will of Cyrus Slater," he stated, "I know. I drew up the will."

"You," corrected Crider, "drew up an earlier will. Shortly before Cyrus Slater left on his last hunting trip, he came to my home. He had read of a number of older men dying of heart attacks while hunting. He had been considering a codicil. Instead he used the main contents of the original will with the changes you recognize."

"We'll sue," Jim Wardman shouted.

"Do, and your wife will lose all right to share in any benefits."

"But he was out of his mind; he had to be." It was Ross Jones talking.

"Mr. Slater was confident some would take that attitude. To forestall possible suit, he underwent both a physical and mental examination. He was found to be sound physically; exceptionally acute mentally.

"The findings together with the signatures of medical men, psychiatrists and businessmen, are appended to the will."

Cindy withdrew further into the chair. She was watching her stepmother's face; it was like a clown's, with rouged spots startlingly red against the chalk white.

Jemalee was laughing hysterically. "Don't you see?" she cried. "Dad's still hanging onto the purse-strings. He still holds us in his power."

Maybe it would be better for Jemalee if he did, thought Cindy, then shook her head. Miffy O'Reilly, the Slaters' cook since time began, had scolded her for judging others.

"It's like a garden, pet," she'd said, "with some plants needing acid and some lime to bring them to blossom."

Jemalee required a rich soil, while she, Cindy, would be happy in a small home, a nice one in a good district. Ross's salary was more than adequate to keep them.

What was Crider saying?

"Miss Jemalee, I believe you were not listening. All of the Slater daughters will have a home here. The house will be kept staffed and stocked and each of you will receive one thousand dollars a year."

That, sighed Cindy, would not begin to pay Jemalee's clothes bills. Suddenly she had to get out of the room.

She started to rise and saw the old attorney watching her. As though giving her permission, he nodded and added a tender, understanding smile that seemed more devastating to her than a frown.

As though he knew something I didn't, she thought, slipping through a rear door. For Crider's smile was one of pity and compassion.

She'd slip up to her room. Ross would call her when the clamor had died down. They would go driving and plan their future.

Her room had been her haven. But since Anne had had it redecorated as a college graduation gift, it was so stylized Cindy felt strange in it; felt she must make over her personality to fit the room.

She longed for the old litter of books and photographs, ridiculous paintings by amateurs, familiar things, something to make her feel secure in a bewildering world. Why? She had Ross, didn't she?

Swiftly she went to a slim desk and from it drew blueprints of the home they had planned. This would be her talisman, her assurance of a better life to come.

A door slammed. Voices lifted. Jim and Mary, in the suite next door, were quarreling.

Hastily Cindy went toward the nearest window to cut off the sound; to silence Mary's high, shrill voice.

"Father obviously caught Krohn and Anne together. He forgot the rest of us to punish her."

"Kurt?" Jim's voice was derisive. "How about Ross? He's been trying to shake Cindy since the first news of Cyrus' disappearance. And stop yapping about him being too young. Anne and Ross are

closer in age than Ross and Cindy. After living with the old man for fourteen years, Anne wants a change."

Cindy didn't close the window. She backed away from it, stunned. Ross and Anne!

A strange sound reached her ears. She looked down. She had been nervously ripping the plans for the house she and Ross were to build.

Slowly the last pieces floated from her hands, and joined the scraps about her feet, ragged segments of a dream, the last of her security.

Now she was alone, completely alone. Anne, who had never been close to any of them, would have Kurt and Ross. Jemalee would race for her car and head for the nearest cocktail bar where friends would be waiting. Mary and Jim would be too engrossed in the collapse of their dream world to know she existed.

Always before, her father had been available to consult on her problems. He had listened, weighed the facts and given crisp answers.

What answer could she expect now? She had a home presided over by a woman who had won the man she, Cindy, had expected to marry. A home, food and a thousand dollars a year.

The home and the food she discounted. She couldn't stay on. A thousand a year. Methodically she computed, whispering "Eighty-three dollars and seventy-five cents a month."

She found she was laughing. She, who had thought that by now she would have thousands of dollars to draw upon and a beloved husband with whom to share it, had only eighty-three dollars and seventy-five cents a month; an amount less than her usual monthly allowance.

Below there was the sound of a car. Cindy looked

down. Ross Jones' car was circling the driveway; beside him sat Anne and Kurt Krohn.

Without a thought about how she might be feeling, they were driving off.

Her heart felt bruised, cut and bleeding. Where had she taken her childish cuts and bruises? To the only person in the Slater household who had time for lonely little girls.

She must go quickly before the tears started. She'd rather fight than cry. Miffy O'Reilly knew all about fighting.

## 2

*Softly*, so she wouldn't be heard by the Wardmans, Cindy hurried past their door to the rear steps and swiftly ran down.

The kitchen door was open onto the small back hall, and from it came the servants' voices.

Miffy said, "And me thinking to be off the feet that are killin' me step by step—"

The house phone stopped her. Cindy heard Clive's "Right, sir," and "Immediately, sir."

And then his voice rose. "Leaving they are, bag and baggage. I'm to have the station wagon ready and then call a dray."

A moment of silence, and Miffy's voice came strongly. "That we must stop. Himself will be all for setting up in business to show he's as good a man as Cyrus. Six months I give them before they come crawling back. Now think, man, how do we stop this? Those nine points of law, what are they?"

"Possession?" asked Nell, timidly.

"Right you are. Clive, you will go up to himself and ask advice."

"Advice!" roared Clive.

"Hush, man, and listen. To himself say we below were that upturned we thought to leave and fight from afar."

"But we never did," cried Nell.

"Be still, will you, and hear me out? Advice he'd not take from us, but he's wily. He'll catch onto what's best for him. Tell him then we remembered possession of jobs and quarters were nine points of the law, and why give up nine to gain one when that one would be coming, given time?"

"A smart woman," Clive conceded. "Nell, Miss Mary is wanting you."

Cindy hurried halfway up the steps and started down, passing the two at the foot.

At their mournful greeting she wheeled into the kitchen angrily. "Father's been gone six months. Why do they act as though someone just died?" She looked at the big woman sitting like a collapsed balloon in an outsized chair and cried, "Oh, Miffy, not someone; something did."

She couldn't crawl into Miffy's lap as she had when she was little. She could and did draw a chair close and let her cold hand be held in two vast, warm ones.

"And how," Miffy asked reasonably, "could something die that had never lived?"

"You don't understand. Ross and Anne—"

"It's eyes I have in my head," the woman assured her, "though there were times when I wondered if you wore blinders."

Cindy's cheeks burned. "You mean everybody—"

"No, child, no. It's myself who had the nerve to say to your father not to press the engagement to

that one. Why, he asks, and I told him the young man couldn't see you for the dollar sign. And says he to me what better way to keep two wed without a divorce than fear the dollar sign be wiped out."

"Then he wiped it out! With that will."

"Could be, with the passing of time, he discovered a better way to love. That I don't know. This we both know: Cyrus Slater was a just man."

"Just?" Again Cindy's voice broke. "What justice is there in Anne having to live here with everyone wishing her dead?"

"Or married. Who's to say it wasn't love of her that made him change? A man will think twice before marrying a penniless widow like herself with her high spending."

Clive came in, his head at a jaunty angle, a smirk on his wrinkled face. "They are staying," he announced, "to protect us and the girls." He laughed a little.

"And now will you tell me if they're staying to lunch? And the others—are they coming back or do we run a short order house the rest of the day?"

"An appointment for himself and shopping for her, with lunch at the club—"

"Shopping?" Miffy's voice rose. "And don't they know credit is chopped off as of today? Or," she added, "do they think to buy up before the axe falls? Miss Cindy—"

"No," Cindy's voice was decisive, "I neither want nor need anything. And," she added stiffly, "Mr. Wardman's credit isn't affected. My sister—" Her voice faltered. These servants knew something she didn't know. "I'm not hungry," she murmured, and hurried from the room.

In her room she paced restlessly, pushing all thought of Ross from her mind. Imagine being caged



in day after endless day. She would be. She couldn't continue with old friends. There were club dues, greens fees and eager-eyed caddies on the "nineteenth hole." There were luncheons; she couldn't let others pick up the check all the time.

Scraps of stiff blue paper caught her eye. It was the wreckage of any plan, any goal.

There would be other men.

"Not for me," she said bitterly. "Never another. I couldn't go through this again."

The telephone rang and Margaret Clark's voice came though, quiet, cautious. "Cindy, what on earth's happened to Jemalee? Ed phoned from the Blue Angel. He said Jem was really tying one on, and you'd better come down and drive her home."

She murmured a thanks, turned to find coat and hat and turned back. In another moment she was racing back downstairs.

"Clive, it's Jemalee at the Blue Angel. Can you manage her before she makes headlines and kills someone doing it?"

Clive gave a guilty look at the radio, where a voice was just signing off the one o'clock news, then looked at Miffy O'Reilly.

"Tell her," snapped Miffy, "she's ruinin' her credit."

"She hasn't any," Cindy flashed.

"Credit? That hasn't sunk into her head yet. Let's bring her home where she'll hurt no one but herself until she knows it."

"Miffy, how well you know all of us."

"That I should. Miss Mary was nine, Jemalee six and yourself but two when I was hired. These twenty years I've watched all of you react until in my sleep I can tell what you'll do."

"All right," Cindy turned on her, "then tell me