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NOT WITHOUT MY CHILD



Rebecca Winters

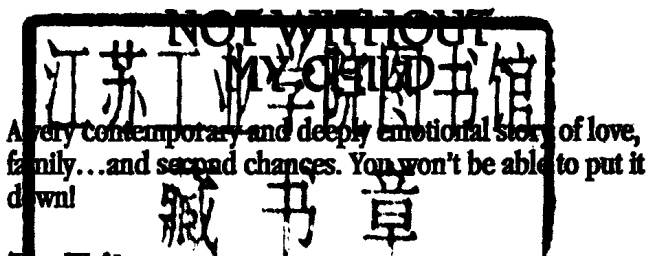
**"Rebecca Winters is a master storyteller whose
characters touch your heart."**

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The Writer:

Rebecca Winters is the award-winning author of *The Wrong Twin*. She's won both the National Readers' Choice Award and the *Romantic Times* Reviewer's Choice Award. She's appeared on bestseller lists and was named the 1995 Utah Writer of the Year.

"Rebecca Winters is a master storyteller whose characters touch your heart. She delivers the ultimate fantasy and captures every woman's dream. A Rebecca Winters romance transports the reader to a magical place, and it's a journey I never want to miss." —Bonnie K. Winn

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Rebecca Winters writes "powerful, moving" stories—stories "filled with passion, betrayal and a love so strong as to overcome all obstacles." —*Affaire de Coeur*

Dear Reader,

It has been said that divorce has no dignity, and therefore it is even more traumatic to the human soul than the death of a spouse.

I wrote this novel, *Not Without My Child*, so you and I could walk in Tessa's footsteps for a few hours and consider the meaning of dignity, explore the *possibility* of dignity.

I think of Tessa as a remarkable woman. She went through a Gethsemane that should have destroyed her. Instead, it refined her and made her strong. When she emerged victorious, she was ready to claim the love of the steadfast man who believed in her, a man worthy of her goodness, courage and faith.

This book is lovingly dedicated to every woman who has ever walked through the shadows.

Rebecca Winters

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**NOT WITHOUT
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NOT WITHOUT MY CHILD

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**NOT WITHOUT
MY CHILD**

CHAPTER ONE

“...SO I’VE DECIDED not to wait any longer. I’m asking Grant for a divorce.”

The man sitting in the swivel chair behind the desk said nothing, only continued to listen with his fingertips pressed together beneath his chin.

Tess Marsden had learned not to expect any support from her psychiatrist regarding problems in her marriage, but it no longer mattered. She was going to divorce Grant.

“Since you know him well, Dr. Milhouse, I wondered if you had any advice on how I should tell him. It won’t come as a surprise to him, though. He’s never actually said the word ‘divorce,’ but I’m sure he’s as anxious as I am to end the pain.”

“And you’ve come to this conclusion since your trip to Hawaii?”

Tess schooled herself not to react, but everything about Dr. Milhouse repulsed her. She’d been his patient for more than four years. He knew her six-year marriage had been a disaster from the start. How could he have asked her such a ridiculous question?

If her own father hadn’t referred her to Dr. Milhouse on the strength of a colleague’s recommenda-

tion, Tess would never have kept her second appointment with him.

To her horror, instead of helping her overcome a short-term postpartum depression, he'd diagnosed her with bipolar disorder, which meant she was manic-depressive. Her mood swings, he'd said, would have to be controlled by medication for the rest of her life.

The dosage was given according to the results of twice-monthly blood tests, which he monitored closely, then followed up with office visits.

She'd dreaded every moment spent in his office. Right from the start he'd attempted to control her life, even her feelings. As a result, she'd closed up long ago, rarely revealing anything of a personal nature. But she had hoped for a little advice before confronting Grant, since the doctor knew her husband well.

Choosing her words carefully, she said, "If it wasn't for my religious convictions, I probably would have divorced him before Scotty was born. It took me some time to realize I didn't fit the image Grant had of me. He thought he was marrying a Michelle Pfeiffer and enjoyed showing me off to business contacts. It was like I was on display all the time."

She took a breath and went on, "He wouldn't let me be just a 'normal' housewife. The more he tried to change me, the more estranged we became. This last year has been impossible, and I've finally admitted to myself that I can't go on this way."

Dr. Milhouse, she noticed, didn't so much as raise a brow. "To my surprise," she said, "when I told my brother, Winn, what I was thinking of doing, he said, 'Hallelujah,' and begged me to go to Hawaii with him and Rae and the kids so we could talk everything out first."

"I told Grant about my going with them and taking Scotty with me. Winn said he'd pay for everything."

Tess sighed. "At first Grant seemed resentful. Probably because we've never been able to afford to go anyplace special for a vacation. But when I reminded him that the tension had been unbearable, he admitted it might be a good idea. So Scotty and I went."

"How long were you gone?"

"Eight days."

"Your trip obviously agreed with you."

"It did. I'm glad I went. Scotty and I haven't had that much fun in years. It was wonderful to put some distance between me and Grant. I gained a whole new perspective."

"Did you meet a man?"

The blandly stated question infuriated her.

"Why would you ask me that?"

"I can see I hit a nerve. You'd be surprised how many of my patients come back from vacations with a whole new lease on life. It generally means they've met someone outside their normal range of experi-

ence and they can disconnect themselves from their problems for a little while. It's entirely normal."

Actually she *had* met a man who wasn't made from the same mold as the people she knew. The experience had been illuminating and had defined certain things for her. But she hadn't had an affair, if that was what the doctor meant, and she was quite certain he did. She suspected he would enjoy hearing all the details.

Tess stared at him in loathing. His total lack of insight and sensitivity at such a crucial moment in her life took away any residual guilt she'd been harboring over what she was about to do.

"Let's just say the trip reaffirmed my need for a divorce." She leaned forward. "So, can you suggest any tactful way I might put this to Grant? I don't want to hurt him."

The doctor pursed his lips. "Look. Promise me you won't say or do anything until I've had a chance to talk to him. Then I want to see you again in two weeks. Be sure and bring a urine sample with you."

"All right," she said, though she had no intention of keeping her next appointment. If everything worked out the way she prayed it would, she would never have to see a psychiatrist again. But no matter the outcome, she would never go back to Dr. Milhouse. The thought filled her with so much elation she feared it showed. "Shall I tell Grant you want to see him?"

"No. I'll call him directly."

"Thank you, Doctor."

"No problem." Then he reached for his prescription pad. He wrote out the order to renew her medication and handed it to her. "Tess?"

"Yes?" She'd gotten to her feet, on the verge of leaving.

"You sound happier than I've heard you in years."

She had the distinct feeling he wasn't at all pleased by that. "I am. And you know why? Because the pain doesn't have to go on and on. Grant is a good person. I can still say that about him, but I'd like to get out of our marriage before I reach the point where I can't. Understand?"

Dr. Milhouse nodded. "As soon as I've talked with Grant, I'll call you to come in again."

DR. MILHOUSE buzzed his nurse and told her to give him five minutes before she sent in his next patient. Then he reached for Tessa Marsden's file. He pulled a pen from the pocket of his lab coat and wrote:

January 20—Patient has returned from trip and is preoccupied with ideas of divorcing her husband. I don't like her euphoria, which is much more pronounced than it was four years ago when she first talked of divorce.

I'll inform her husband that her evasiveness suggests a possible liaison with a man she met in Hawaii. She should never have been allowed to go on that trip. Suspect she was introduced to il-

licit drugs and needs constant supervision.

Would have checked her urine this visit, but she is showing classic signs of resisting me and keeping secrets. Will do a pregnancy check, as well as tests for possible traces of cocaine, speed or amphetamines in urine on next visit February 3.

Have increased her Valium to 2.5 mg po quid prn anxiety and lithium carbonate to 300 mg po tid. If that doesn't slow her down, then stronger measures will have to be taken. Will advise husband to keep her under strict surveillance.

FOR THE FIRST TIME in four years Tess didn't stop at the pharmacy on her way out. The feeling was so liberating she practically danced to her car.

It was almost eleven. Her father would have finished his hospital rounds and be at his office by now. She hoped he'd be able to fit her in between patients.

Five minutes later she pulled into the parking lot of the Colorado Springs Clinic of Orthopedic Surgery. As always, the reception room was packed, but the friendly woman at the front desk told her to go on back; her father'd be thrilled to see her.

Though Richard Jenner was in his late sixties, he still had a full head of hair, the same rich dark brown as Tess's. A tall man, temperate in every way, he wore the size-forty-two suit he'd always worn. He had a

smile for everyone, and his patients adored him. So did Tess.

"Hi, Daddy."

"Honey, you're back! I wondered when I was going to hear from you. Winn phoned early this morning."

"I hope you don't mind my interrupting like this." She went around his desk where he was working on his charts and hugged him.

"Shame on you for saying that." He looked at her with pride. "I don't need to ask if you had a good time. You're so tanned, and beautiful as always."

"Thanks, Daddy. Hawaii was wonderful. I'll never be able to thank Rae and Winn enough for asking me and Scotty along."

"Everyone needs to get away once in a while."

She hugged him again. Her father was the most tactful diplomatic man she'd ever known. It was his way of saying he knew she was unhappy in her marriage, but he'd never pry.

She swallowed hard, keeping her hand on his shoulder. "Daddy...do you have a few minutes to talk?"

He must have sensed her anxiety because he said, "I'll make time." He spoke into the intercom, asking his nurse not to disturb them.

Tess walked over and shut the door before sitting down on a chair near his desk.

"I met a man in Hawaii named Paul Wong, the owner of the hotel where we were staying. To get to

the point, he had a son who drowned in the ocean when he was Scotty's age. For some reason, Scotty reminded him of his son, and he doted on him while we were there. We all became good friends."

Her father nodded. "Winn told me."

"Well, I guess during one of their conversations, Scotty told him I had to take medication every day to survive. Paul doesn't believe in Western medicine. In a very polite way, he asked me why I was on the drugs."

"What did you tell him?"

"I explained what happened to me after Scotty was born." She paused and studied her father's solemn expression before going on. "I told him how I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder, and how much I hated taking the medicine. It makes me feel slow and dull-witted, like I'm wrapped in cotton ~~snubbing~~."

She smiled. "Paul was such a wonderful listener I found myself telling him other things, as well. Things I've wanted to confide in you, but I haven't dared because . . . you were the one who referred me to Dr. Milhouse in the first place."

A rare frown creased her father's brow. "Honey, you can tell me anything. What are you getting at?"

"I—I've never liked Dr. Milhouse. And I've come to realize he enjoyed controlling me with drugs. He wasn't any real help to me beyond dispensing my medication. When I told Paul about him, he agreed with me that Dr. Milhouse has been manipulative, leaving me with no sense of hope about my condi-

tion or my marriage, thereby making me more and more dependent on medicine."

She took a deep breath. "Paul has challenged me to stop taking the drugs and see what happens."

"Thank God!"

Her father's reaction was so unexpected she was shocked. "Then you don't think I'm crazy?"

He shook his head. "On the contrary, I think you're the bravest person I know. I'm indebted to this man for suggesting something that I should've discussed with you. *Intended* to discuss with you."

"You did? But why...?"

"Honey, I was devastated when Dr. Milhouse diagnosed you as manic-depressive. I knew it meant constant medication. I always felt he moved too soon on that diagnosis. But since I'm the one who told you to go and see him on the advice of a trusted colleague, I couldn't very well argue with his treatment."

He sighed. "I didn't say anything to you because I knew how precarious things were with you and Grant. I didn't want him to see it as interference. But your mother and I aren't blind to your marital difficulties and realize you can't go on this way much longer. That's the reason Winn invited you to go to Hawaii."

Tess hadn't confided in her parents because she hadn't wanted to burden them, yet they'd known all along! She felt warmth flood her.

“I’m so glad!” she cried. “I want to stop cold turkey, the way Uncle Jess quit smoking. As Paul said, the worst that can happen is that I go back into depression like I did after I had Scotty. If that’s the case, I’ll consult another psychiatrist and go from there. But if Paul’s right and I don’t need medicine—if my condition has reversed itself—then I’ve got to find that out, too. I’d like to do it before I ask Grant for a divorce.”

“I’m with you all the way, honey.”

Encouraged, she said, “Paul’s reasoning makes perfect sense. After all, I’d never suffered depression until after my baby was born. He thinks I was depressed over my marriage.”

“With good reason,” her father concurred. “Your mother and I have often speculated that if you had divorced Grant before Scotty was born, you might never have suffered any depression at all.”

“Oh, Daddy, I’m so grateful you support me in this. I have to find out one way or the other, before I file.”

“Honey, I’d give anything on earth to see you happy again. I’ll do whatever it takes to make that possible.”

“Thank you. That means everything to me,” she whispered, and threw her arms around his neck. They hugged for a long time.

When at last they pulled apart, Tess gazed at her father, her eyes shiny with tears, and said, “Do you know that since I was diagnosed, Grant has treated