



My (not so)
Storybook Life

A Tale of Friendship and Faith

ELIZABETH OWEN

Fresh, funny, and poignant, *My (not so) Storybook Life* is old-fashioned humor mashed with literary spoofery. Elizabeth thinks of herself and her husband, Matt, as a modern-day Lucy and Ricky Ricardo. Together they've endured paint-color mishaps, sewage disasters, pest infestations, and a schnauzer that poops at tornado sirens. It's hardly the domestic perfection a young Liz imagined while reading *Anne of Green Gables* and *Pride and Prejudice*. Could it be that these literary stalwarts had led her astray?

Liz tells the story of her own path to happiness, along the way seeking revenge on her literary heroes: Jo March has to cope with a soul-sucking job, Elizabeth Bennett shepherds a Duggar-size brood of kids, and Anne Shirley deals with a penny-pinching husband. But every comedy is balanced by tragedy. Angela was one of Liz's closest friends, a kindred spirit who at age thirty-one was diagnosed with cancer. Before Angela, Liz was discontented. But it was the journey she took with this friend that made her realize that her house and its decorations and plumbing and dirty-clothes-covered Man Cave were not burdens to be tweaked and perfected, but blessings to be thankful for.

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This book is 99.9 percent true. The other 0.1 percent is embellished for comic effect with the express purpose of causing you to laugh, snort iced tea up your nose, and forget for a few hours that your laundry room looks like the aftermath of Mount St. Helens and the children in the backyard are turning your herb garden into a mud-wrestling pit.

You're welcome.



Prologue

Anne reclined by the bubbling brook, twirling a loose string on the red-and-pink patchwork quilt beneath her. The bright yellow Canadian summer sun glowed above her, the birds chirping in the nearby lush woods, the breezy air rustling her long red curls.

“Gil, can we start house hunting soon?”

“Sure.” Gilbert leaned back on his elbows and took a big bite of a ripe apple. “I’ve been thinking it might be time for us to leave Prince Edward Island. Stretch our wings a bit. Start life, our life, together somewhere new.”

Anne sat upright. “What? We’ve never talked about leaving the island!”

“Yeah, I’ve just been mulling it over . . .” Gilbert took another big bite as a dove cooed in the nearby bushes.

“But I love this place!” Anne brushed her fiery hair out of her face. “What about the farmhouse down on Hummingbird Cove? The one with the hundred-year-old roses on the porch! I thought we were going to fix it up, add on a bigger kitchen? Make it look just like Green Gables?”

“Oh, Annie.” Gilbert made a sour face. “That old termite trap? Look at this brochure I picked up. I think you’ll be really excited.”

Anne reached out and took the brochure, eyeing it as cautiously as Marilla eyed Yankee tourists. “Lakeview Terrace?”

“That’s where we’re moving.” Gilbert’s eyes twinkled. “We’re going to leave all these country hicks behind and start

over. In the city! Did you know they have ten different floor plans to choose from? And all the houses are a new style; they call them ‘ranch’ homes. Isn’t that exciting?”

“Not really,” Anne muttered darkly.

“And the best thing is they have an elementary school, post office, church, and grocery store all right around the corner. They’re calling these places ‘subdivisions.’”

“No!” Anne slammed the brochure into the dirt. “I want the country! I love nature and birds and starry nights! I want my farmhouse on Hummingbird Cove!”

“Let’s be reasonable.” Gilbert patted her hand. He knew Anne’s emotional temper could quickly spiral into a sparkling fire ablaze with unladylike adjectives and punches thrown from the shoulder. His only defense was distraction. “Are you hungry? Let’s go get you some food. How about a chocolate shake? Or one of those mint sundaes you like so much at the drugstore?”

Anne frowned and pursed her lips, allowing Gilbert to help her up off the ground. “But Gil . . . I have really always wanted that farmhouse . . .”

“Shhhh, you’ll feel better once you’ve eaten something.”

Anne found herself being led from the meadow, pictures of mint sundaes dancing in her head, the farmhouse on Hummingbird Cove waving from the distance in her memory. She didn’t know it then, but she was destined to downsize Marilla’s antique furniture to small modern sleeper sofas and sell the family china because it couldn’t be washed in the dishwasher Gil bought from Sears and Roebuck. It was the beginning of the end. The end of well water and crickets and dusty summer roads.

It was the end of country life and girlish fantasies. It was the beginning of lawn mowers, mosquito sprayers, and sidewalks. It was the beginning of overstressed dinner parties, plumbing disasters, and a six-month period when Gilbert's little brother lived in the guest bedroom as he searched for a job.

Years later Anne would stand on her patio—the sound of traffic rushing in the distance, the stars obscured by smog—and raise her fist, shouting, “Who stole my Green Gables?”



I've spent the lion's share of my mental energy and physical effort working toward an ultimate life goal: domestic contentment. And I think I have found it, despite what my husband Matt might argue. Sure, he'll snicker and tell of my weekly tirades where I work all day, come home to read a decorating magazine, and then kick our sofa muttering, "Why can't you be more like your cousins at Pottery Barn?" But I digress.

Like all women, I have a secret and overwhelming urge to be a genetically spliced version of Martha Stewart and Ina Garten, with a dash of Sandra Lee thrown in for fun. I really like her hair.

Despite going to college and subsequently holding down a job, I spent years berating myself for my domestic limitations and disasters. I was shamed by my undersize area rugs, burned kitchen countertops, and a dog that insisted

on pooping in the hallway during thunderstorms. But long before Martha, Ina, and Sandra combined in a big cloud of insecurity above my head, there was literature.

Most of us bookworms begin deluding ourselves from a young age. From the brooding mansions of *Jane Eyre* to the March sisters' New England farmhouse, we buried ourselves in the paper promises of fanciful homes, totally unprepared for the much less romantic reality we would one day face as grown-ups.

As gangly twelve-year-olds lying in the backyard, we constructed our dream homes from fiction. I personally saw myself (with magically transformed auburn hair just like a grown-up Anne Shirley) living on forty acres with my very own white farmhouse with curtains fluttering over apple pies cooling in the window. I called it *Liz Gables*. I don't know, don't ask.

There were several areas of miscalculation with this dream.

1. I'm a brunette. During my sophomore year in college I dyed my hair red to begin my Anne Shirley metamorphosis. I ended up looking like a jaundiced Ronald McDonald.
2. Our current home is smack dab in the middle of a sixty-year-old suburb full of oak trees and ranch homes in such close proximity that I could use the bathroom and simultaneously spit out the window on my neighbor's house.

3. If there are apple pies in our house, they come from Kroger and get reheated in the microwave. Some women fall into the category of phenomenal cooks, and then there are women like me who fall in the “Typhoid Mary” cooking category.

And so, after spending years imagining dwellings like Mr. Darcy’s mansion or Nancy Drew’s 1940s two-story colonial, we grow up and buy our first homes. We turn the brand-new doorknob, walk into an open floor plan with beige carpet and no crown molding, throw up our hands and say, “Who stole my spiral staircase? Where’s the butler’s pantry? Wait, what is a butler’s pantry?”

I found myself comparing our home’s square footage with that of Mr. Darcy’s vast grounds. When I overcooked a pot roast, I wiped away a small tear and thought of Auntie Em’s home-cooked farm food. When I couldn’t afford an expensive sofa from Anthropologie, I found myself wishing for an estate sale at Wuthering Heights.

And then I stumbled upon a coping mechanism. When things went awry and off course in my own domestic universe, I projected reality onto my favorite literary friends. I pretended that Rhett Butler nicked his leg because he tried to trim weeds on the grounds of Tara while wearing a pair of shorts. I imagined Nancy Drew at her in-laws’ house, surrounded by hick relatives who referred to squirrels as the “steak of the forest.” I envisioned a cockroach crawling across the floor of the Capulets’ dinner party.

All of my literary friends were plucked from their peaceful pages and tortured.

And as I proceeded to put these poor literary figures through the gristmill of reality, I realized there was much more to their stories than idyllic islands, lush fields, and sweeping manors. There was, at the center, the cog of friendship. Jo and Laurie, Elizabeth and Jane, Nancy and Bess, Anne and Diana; their stories leave us with reminders about what really matters. They cared for each other. They laughed with each other. They cried with each other. And when the chips were down, they rescued each other.

I don't know about you, but I love a good rescue. My favorite movie moments are the salvation moments. A woman is fighting off an intruder and—*bam!* Her neighbor kicks in the door and comes to her rescue. A family's car goes off the bridge and into a river and—*bam!* A Coast Guard boat fishes them out of the water. A rock climber loses his footing and clings helplessly to a mountain, and—*bam!* A rescue chopper lowers a ladder to safety. These deliverers appear just in the nick of time. They appear in planned ways that are not merely coincidental, but ordained by fate.

Heroic rescues are not the sole property of Hollywood. You find them in literature when Anne Shirley reenacts "The Lady of Shalott," nearly drowns, and Gilbert saves her. Scarlett shoots a Yankee soldier, and Melanie helps her hide the body. Marianne Dashwood twists her ankle, and Willoughby runs to her aid. Amy March falls through the pond just as Jo and Laurie turn back to skate to her rescue.

I love these moments, not just because they are romantic or action packed; I love what they represent. Beneath the pistol protection, dire emergencies, and perilous mountain climbs lies something more meaningful. It's a juxtaposition of perfectly timed redemption. Where something awful and ominous could have been, something positive thunders through the gloom and catastrophe. The sun rises. The chorus swells. These rescue scenes serve as reminders that perhaps a great plan is unfolding, that perhaps amid all the chaos and stranded souls in the world, destiny happens at critical moments.

This moment, for me, was defined by my friendship with a woman named Angela. And if I was meant to play the frenzied, temperamental Anne role, Angela most assuredly filled the loyal, levelheaded Diana shoes.

And like the Coast Guard ship or the rescue helicopter—Angela's friendship came to me during a dissatisfied, pivotal moment in which I needed her (but didn't know it yet). But there was another side of the coin. She needed me as well. She had a hard journey to face and needed a friend to walk it with her.

Our friendship wasn't an accident. It wasn't a coincidence. It was fate, with perhaps the slightest hint of salvation.

CHAPTER 1

Home Sweet Wuthering Home

The winds are sweeping across the moors and a large fireplace is crackling cozily at the end of an elegant sitting room. Rain peppers arched windows in lacy patterns as Heathcliff and Catherine enjoy hot tea under the protective roof of Wuthering Heights. And then, the peace is broken. . . .

“Heathy, did you leave the water running in the kitchen?”

“No, why?”

“Hmmm . . . that’s funny. I hear running water. You don’t hear that? That trickle?”

Heathcliff shook his head, “Nah, I don’t hear anything.”

“With all due respect Heathy, I hear like a bat, and you have the decibel capacity of a water buffalo.”

Heathcliff’s eyes narrowed, “Why of all the names in the world that you could choose from did you pick water buffalo? Is that what Edgar calls me when I’m not around?! It is, isn’t it!?”

“Oh, shush!” Catherine stood and her knitting fell to the floor. “The sound is coming from the fireplace. Come look at this.”

Heathcliff rose, running a hand through his rakish hair as he stood next to Catherine, gazing up at the ancient stone fireplace. There, before them, flowed a small river. It ran from the

top of the ceiling, ambled between the rocks and grout, spilled over the mantle, and splattered onto the hearth.

“I thought you said the roofers fixed the flashing on that leak?” Catherine said, hands on her hips.

Heathcliff’s forehead wrinkled into a thousand angry crevices as he pounded his fist into his hand. “So help me, when I get hold of those roofers, I’ll kick the living crap out of them.”

“Now Heathy, calm down.” Catherine gingerly patted his back. “Remember your temper. Let’s practice those breathing techniques we talked about. Breathe, one, two, three . . .”

“Calm down?! We paid those guys \$5,700 to reroof the place! Not only did they pee in the backyard during their lunch breaks, but now we have Niagara Falls in the living room!”

Catherine watched her beloved rant and rave as he reached for his cell phone, ready for battle. She gave a deep sigh, grabbed a nearby quilt, and began mopping up the water trickling toward the rug. It was going to be a very, very long night.



Is it possible to predict who our dearest friends will be? Can we make a list of qualities and say, “Any best friend of mine will be outgoing and preferably drive a low emission car because, you know, the environment is very important to me”?

I think we all know the answer. Friendships are no different than true love. They can’t be planned or predicted; they come into our lives like great gusts of wind that knock things

off the shelves and force us to stretch ourselves in uncomfortable yet beautiful ways. Sometimes friendship strikes like lightning and you know, instantly, that you and that person will be friends when you're old. You know that the two of you will be grumpy little old ladies shopping in Kohl's, arguing with the staff about sale prices and the proximity of the nearest parking space.

It was that way when I met Angela.

Of course, at the time, a cosmically ordained friendship was the furthest thing from my mind. The only thing I could focus on was my new home. Just one month earlier, my husband Matt and I had joined the leagues of new homeowners, oblivious to the housing bubble about to burst. I, however, approached this financial commitment with my default reaction: pessimism. It's in my DNA.

When I was a child, my parents gave me a fantastic dollhouse for Christmas. Instead of reveling in the bright green bathroom with shower, or the sleek minivan, or the spiral staircase in the living room, I leaned down, examined the plastic foundation, and said, "I think this place has termite damage."

When I was eight I cried for an entire afternoon because I'd left my bike outside during a snowstorm. "Rust damage is irreversible," I wailed.

At age twelve I informed mom, "If we don't do something about the mold growing on the ceiling over the shower, we'll all develop serious lung problems."

At age sixteen I passed on buying a car and bummed rides from friends instead stating, "Are you kidding? The

blue book value on one of those tin cans plummets the moment you drive it off the lot.”

Now in my twenties, I sat at the front desk of an office, stewing like a pot full of bubbling tomatoes, worrying that our new house was besieged by invisible fungus or pipes that contained lead.

Having graduated a few years earlier with an English degree, my ego had taken a beating. Actually, my ego had been escorted to a giant courtyard, chained to a pole, and publically flogged. You see, all English majors have lofty goals. We picture ourselves as great authors with castles in Scotland or beach homes in Key West where we'll pen great works of literature. We imagine ourselves at book signings wearing swoopy shawls with writerly glasses.

The reality is, if an English major lands a job answering phones and has health insurance, she's already ahead of the pack. And while I might not have succeeded in very many things in life, I was determined to be the very best homeowner in the universe. I planned to funnel every ounce of energy into perfecting my own *Green Gables*, my own mini kingdom of folded laundry and sparkling toilet bowls.

So there I was answering phones and wearing a swoopy shawl and writerly glasses in case anyone wanted me to autograph a purchase order. We were interviewing candidates for another position in the office, and Angela arrived first. She walked brusquely through the doors wearing a suit, her long dark hair pinned into a bun.

“I'm here for the interview. I'm Angela.”

She was businesslike, but not unfriendly.

“Nice to meet you.”

I reached out to shake her hand just as my boss, Darren, barked from his office, “Elizabeth, have you checked to see if there’s legal paper in the copy room? I hope you didn’t forget to order it.”

I took a deep sigh and closed my eyes, fighting to extinguish the flames that had erupted at my feet and swooshed over the top of my head. Of course I’d remembered. He’d mentioned it thirty-six times in forty-eight hours, shouting from his desk like a passive-aggressive turtle yelling from the safety of his shell. I took another deep, cleansing breath. It didn’t work. I’d read Tolstoy, and this jerk was nagging me about legal paper. When I opened my eyes, Angela was watching me in silence, an amused crinkle at the corners of her bright green eyes.

She smiled graciously and seated herself in the waiting area across from my desk. She was only a few years older than me, yet her appearance was impeccable, as if she’d stepped out of a more civilized era. She didn’t slump. Her nails were trimmed in perfect crescents. Art-Deco era earrings bobbed above her shoulders. Peeping out of her bag was a copy of *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

I was sure, after having only known her for thirty seconds, that she was a paragon of good manners, well-read, self-assured, quiet, and loyal. She was also, no doubt, quirky. After all, how many people bring along an Oscar Wilde book to an interview?

She caught me staring and smiled politely. But behind the smile lay a certain determination that sprung from what my grandmother describes as “grit.” The smile said in no uncertain terms, “It’s lovely to meet you, dear stranger, but it’s terribly rude to stare.”

I smiled back and leaned forward. “Sorry, we don’t get many visitors during the day. I didn’t mean to inspect you.”

She smiled, this time warmly. “That’s perfectly all right. I completely understand. I worked in an isolated office at my last job. I spent every day filing papers, returning phone calls, dusting my keyboard, and exploring the Internet for information on English castles and scone recipes. I got excited when the coffee salesman came to take our order. When I got home I’d ask my husband to take my pulse, just to make sure I was still alive and not in some sort of administrative purgatory.”

I laughed and pointed to the book hanging from her bag, “I see you like Oscar Wilde.”

“No, I love Oscar Wilde. I see you like to read as well?” she asked, examining the stack of books on my desk.

I nodded. “I actually majored in English.”

Most people found this bit of information surprising. After all, the general public usually places the receptionist in the same hierarchical category with waitresses and janitors. Telling them you have a college degree usually throws an uncomfortable vibe into the air, an imbalance to the American class system. But I believe you can tell everything you need to know about a person’s character by observing

how much they tip or if they greet the custodian mopping the lobby.

Angela didn't bat an eye. "I'm working on my master's in English. Please tell me you hate Faulkner."

I bugged my eyes and nodded excitedly. Hating Faulkner is something no self-respecting Southerner is supposed to admit. I liked her instantly.

At that moment Darren waddled from his doorway. He was a short man, endowed with a beefy figure and an uncomfortable ability to arrange entire conversations around his previous profession as a farmer. This sort of strange segue was really just his creepy way of discussing uncomfortable, inappropriate things with female coworkers—in other words, with me. In short, he was odd and pervy.

One minute he would expound the merits of a proper filing system and out of nowhere he'd shift into farm-pervert mode. "But how does the baby cow know to find the nipple? I mean, it's a miracle, the fact that he knows to find the nipple. I think it's evidence of God's beautiful plan, that babies know how to find the nipple." Of course, I believed our conversations had nothing to do with God's plan, but merely his sicko inclination to discuss nipples with a secretary thirty years his junior.

Angela had no way of knowing this as she followed him into the interview. I wanted to warn her, to flag her down and say, "Watch out! He's a pervert." But as she passed by my desk, she gazed down on my well-worn copy of *Anne of Green Gables* and smiled widely, giving me a wink as she

whispered almost inaudibly, “He looks like Boss Hogg, but I think we should call him “Toad.””

I watched her vanish behind closed doors and knew immediately that she, like Anne’s Diana, would be my friend, a true kindred spirit. After all, we had already forged our own secret code word in a matter of minutes. Toad, indeed. It would be only a matter of weeks before I got a job in another department and leaped out from underneath Toad’s thumb. But despite my knowledge that I would soon be in another office down the hall, I hoped they would hire her. I sincerely longed for a friend at work. I dreamed of having someone to commiserate with, to go to lunch with, and to suffer alongside when Darren went on tangents or made inappropriate comments.

After Angela’s interview was over she gave me a friendly wave and I shot her a thumbs up sign. As hopeful as I was that she would be hired, I didn’t have much time to think about it. Matt and I were meeting after work to begin painting our new house, and I could see gloomy gray clouds on the horizon.

Despite a clean bill of health from our inspector, I just knew there was something horribly wrong lurking beneath those cheerful 1950s ranch walls. I was also suffering from my “ladies’ time” which frankly, renders me incapable of cheerful behavior. PMS combined with the adult burden of great debt swirled above my head, creating a toxic cocktail of negative emotions.

Basically, I was on a tear.

And while I'm a dyed in the wool, yellow dog pessimist, I married a good-hearted optimist. To sufficiently describe Matt, I'll quote my greatest hero, Erma Bombeck: *"Most of us can't be like the optimist who was given a barn full of fertilizer and ran through it pell mell shouting, 'I know there's a pony here somewhere.'"*

Matt comes home from work, takes off his shoes, sighs, and says, "Gosh it's good to be home."

I come home from work, kick my shoes across the room, and shriek about the traffic.

Matt opens the mailbox with eager anticipation of finding a fun magazine or a coupon for steaks.

I open the mailbox and stare into its depths, expecting nothing but bills and bad news.

As Erma pointed out, Matt enters the barn looking for a pony, and I sniff the air and say, "It smells like crap in here."

It was getting dark as we pulled into the carport, unloaded the vats of wall paint we'd just purchased, and unlocked the door. It was our goal to complete all the painting before we moved in the furniture—a wise yet ambitious plan for two newbie homeowners. Frankly, I'd never even wielded a paintbrush before.

Matt fiddled with the keys a second-and-a-half too long and I clutched my throat, blurting, "We're going to have to get that door handle changed, I bet it's broken!"

"It's not broken," Matt stated, opening the door easily and ushering me inside.

Instead of reveling in our first home, instead of skipping like Julie Andrews and spinning with outspread skirts in our empty formal living room, I glared acidly at the lavender-and-lime-green walls (courtesy of the previous fun-house-color-loving owners).

“These original colors are brighter than I remember, we should have bought primer. Regular paint will never cover this.”

“It will be fine,” Matt said as he began opening the lid to the first paint can.

“Don’t spill it!” I yelped, eyeing the floor. “Hey, do you remember this big scratch in the hardwood when we were here last time?”

Matt paused, staring upward in silent prayer, perhaps not that God might turn me into a pillar of salt, but just render me temporarily mute.

“Liz, you’re going to have to calm down.”

As I glared unflinchingly into my husband’s eyes, I knew he was right. I knew I should calm down, unclench, and reboot. But I also knew there was no way that was going to happen.

“Well, all I’m saying is . . . that’s a huge scratch. It looks like Lizzie Borden dragged a hatchet across the floor. And look at that crooked light fixture! I don’t remember it being that hideous. Do you think that’s damaged the wiring? I’m calling our agent.”

What happened next is a bit blurry. Matt called me a Negative Nellie. I accused him of being an ostrich or a big buffalo, I can’t really remember which. But what I do remember

was being mid-yell during the sentence, “I’m *not* negative, I’m just realistic!” when I realized that every window in the house was standing wide open.

My eyes bulged. I pointed wordlessly to the front window as a dove began to coo outside. “Now look what you’ve done!”

“*What?*” Matt shot back.

“The neighbors are going to think we’re crazy!” I stamped my foot.

“The neighbors won’t think *I*’m crazy,” Matt said, returning to his paint can.

And at that moment the doorbell rang.

A normal person would have noticed the lovely couple from next door standing on the front porch with a plate full of welcome cookies. A normal person would have hidden her head in shame at the open windows and the new acquaintances that were sure to have heard us call each other “Nitwit” and “Scab Picker.” But instead I cocked my head and listened with zealous glee to the warbled, off-key, dying-bird sound that was our doorbell with the triumph of a gladiator who had just speared his opponent through the jugular.

“*Seeeee!*” I hissed loudly at Matt. “I *told* you something was wrong with this house. Just listen to that cacophony the sellers called a doorbell!”

“*Shhhhhh . . .*” Matt gently pushed me aside. “Try not to scare them.”

Our new neighbors, Mason and Deanna, turned out to be lovely people. Matt and I chatted and smiled, faking marital bliss like two seasoned con artists. At one point I think we

even held hands, despite the fact that only minutes before I had threatened to rip off a piece of drywall to prove there was black mold growing just out of sight.

After they said goodbye, leaving us with a plate of delicious chocolate chip cookies, I began to feel remorse. Or it could have been the fact that the magical properties in the chocolate were soothing the monstrous PMS beast lurking behind my seemingly placid exterior.

“I’m sorry,” I said, chomping the cookies. “I don’t know what’s come over me.”

Matt patted my shoulder. “That’s okay.”

I swallowed another cookie whole. “Let’s just start painting. I’ll feel better.”

And so we did. We spread out the plastic, turned on the radio, and spent the next two hours turning the walls in our bright lavender living room to bridal gown white. It was fun. It was blissful. It was stress free. I breathed a sigh of relief as the tension slowly left my chest; the stress headache in the back of my head began to lessen. There were no broken windows or uneven floors. There was no need to replace the heat and air unit, the doors were secure. Our kitchen cabinets were old but clean, and there wasn’t a single problem that couldn’t be solved with a little bit of paint and a new light fixture.

All was right with the world. We washed our paintbrushes out in the kitchen sink, cleaned up, and exited through the garage door.

“That was fun,” I said.

“Do you feel better now?” Matt smiled.

I took a deep breath. “Absolutely.”

“Good,” Matt kissed the top of my head and unlocked my car door.

And then I looked down.

Below my feet, flowing peacefully like the Nile, was a wide, babbling stream of white water. It flowed merrily like a brook across the carport, under the car, and down the driveway.

My voice became very low and I blinked a few times, recognizing that this could very well be the catastrophe that finally gave me a massive heart attack at the ripe old age of twenty-six.

“Matt, what is that?”

Matt’s face was pale in the moonlight, horror written all over his normally peaceful features. “I think we have a leaky pipe.”

I inhaled the clean night air through both my nostrils as hard and fast as I could, doing everything possible to stay on my feet and not scream like a baby at a bris.

And then, the unthinkable happened. Matt got really, really angry.

“Dangit!” He threw his keys to the ground. “It’s all the water from the sink in the kitchen running out from under the house! That’s why it’s white! It’s paint water! The water we just used to clean the brushes!”

It was a life-changing occurrence. When faced with an angry Matt—something that happened only about as often