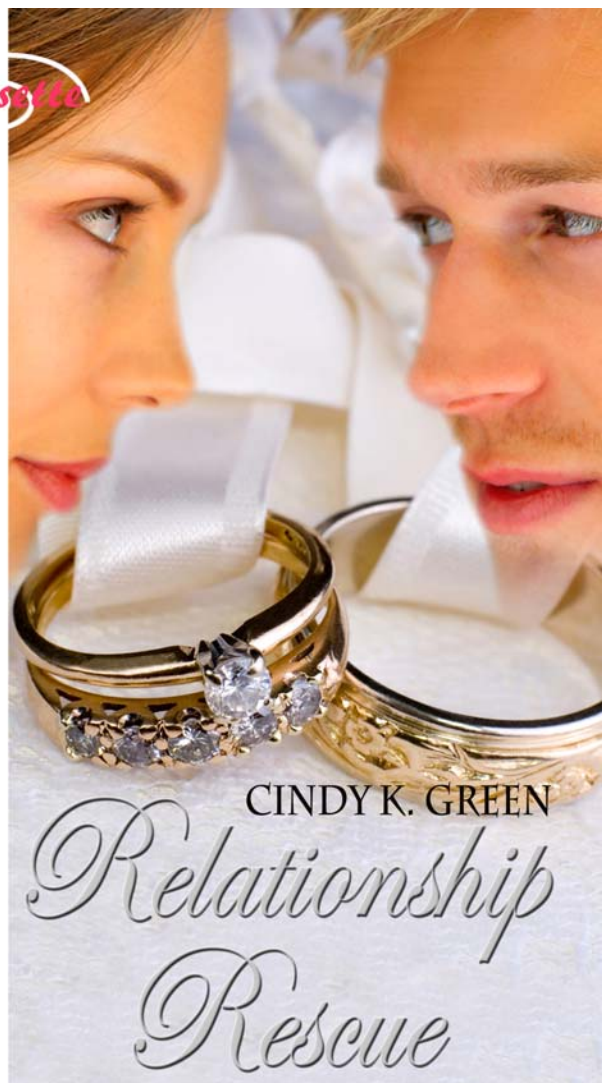


Rosette

White Rose



CINDY K. GREEN

Relationship Rescue

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by

Cindy K. Green

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Relationship Rescue

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Contact Information: info@thewildrosepress.com

Cover Art by *Nicola Martinez*

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Dedication

To my Mother. Thank you for all your love, guidance
and encouragement.

Praise for Relationship Rescue

Cindy K. Green has crafted a bittersweet story of failed love and second chances. Sometimes touching, sometimes funny, this short, sweet read will warm your heart.

~ Kara Lynn Russell, author of the Orchard Hill series of Inspirational romances.

Prologue

“Do you think he’s lonely,” Marina Anthony asked as they stepped out of the church building on a beautiful Sunday afternoon. The sky was a bright blue with fluffy white clouds scattered here and there. Birds were singing in nearby trees and the sun was gently warming.

“Who, dear?” her husband, Chad, asked. He couldn’t help but smile at her.

“Mitch,” she replied as they watched their friend, Mitchell Regan, climb into his old, green pick-up, the bright spring sun reflecting off his windshield.

Chad laughed while he wrapped an arm around his wife’s shoulders. “You worrying about Mitch again?” His tone was playfully chiding.

“How can I not? He hasn’t been the same since he and Robynn broke up six months ago.”

“So, do you think he’s love sick over Robynn or something?”

“No, not exactly.” Her expression was deeply troubled as she looked up to him. “But there is a sad, loneliness about his eyes.”

“And what about Robynn?”

“She hasn’t been the same either. They’re both so depressingly...polite to each other.”

Chad laughed at his wife again. “And would you rather they insulted one another through the church service.”

“No, of course not.”

Mitch drove by them with a wave. Both husband and wife returned the wave with accompanying

smiles.

Marina turned to her husband again. "Chad, maybe they just need to be reminded of why they fell in love with each other in the first place."

"Now, Marina, don't start playing matchmaker."

"Oh, Chad, please. What could it hurt? And think of all the good we might do. I know they're meant to be together; it hurts me to see them both so miserable."

Her eyes lit up earnestly and her husband was reminded of why he loved his wife of ten years so very much.

"We better get over to the coffee house. You know how the crowd forms on Sundays if we open after one p.m."

"But, Chad..."

"And then we'll discuss this idea of yours, and if it's in God's will, maybe they'll come back together."

She gave him a satisfactory smile and they headed for the car. Chad knew his wife's head was swimming with ideas of how to bring Mitch and Robynn back together.

Love is patient, love is kind...

Chapter One

Robynn Hartley leaned back into the wall adjacent to the door leading into the Anthony's café, *Gimme a Latte*. She dipped her head downward and drew in a deep breath before releasing it.

Why is he here? Why tonight of all nights?

It was just her luck to have returned from the worst blind date in the history of the world to now be faced with her ex-fiancé. Sneaking another peek, she could see Mitch Regan sipping a cup of coffee. Marina and Chad Anthony were behind the counter, chatting with another customer. The entire café seemed to be filled to the brim with patrons. Her eyes veered back to Mitch. The only available seat appeared to be next to him. He moved a hand through his short sandy-blond hair as he sat back into the sofa, his eyes roving around the room.

As she watched him, the overwhelming sadness she usually kept below the surface, came pouring over her. She realized how lonely he looked. Why hadn't she noticed the appearance of those lines around his eyes before this moment? The familiar ache in her heart started up again. She backed away from the window and rested her head against the wall behind her.

Oh, Lord, Why? It was the same question she'd been asking for six long months and she was still waiting to receive a satisfying answer. It was as if God didn't think she was ready yet. Maybe there was some other lesson she was meant to learn in the larger scheme of things.

“Robynn, it is you.”

Robynn raised her eyes to see a couple walking toward her, pushing a baby in a stroller. She recognized Anna and Nate Stephenson, frequent shoppers at her baby boutique, and their cute-as-a-button six-month-old daughter, Kelsey.

“Oh, hey, Anna,” Robynn replied. She leaned down to the baby. “And how is my favorite customer.” She shook her head from side to side at the little girl with animation. “Hello, Kelsey. It’s nice to see you, Kelsey,” she said in a babyish tone.

The baby’s face broke out into a large toothless grin and then she squealed with delight. “She’s always happy to see you, Robynn,” said Nate.

“When are you finally going to get married and have a baby, Robynn?” asked Anna with a smile.

It was annoying how often she was asked that question and how much it hurt to hear it now. But what did she expect as the owner of a baby shop. It was different when she was with Mitch. They’d made plans for a future—a life, a house, and children with God at the center of it all.

Thankfully, before she had to respond to Anna’s question, Nate asked her another one. “Are you waiting for some friends tonight?”

Robynn only smiled in answer; it was easier than admitting she had no life.

“Nate, look there. Isn’t that Mitchell Regan?” asked Anna.

“Do you know, Mitch?” asked Robynn, a bit taken back. She tried to keep her voice reserved and even.

“Sure,” Nate replied. “He’s been Kelsey’s photographer since she was born.”

“You should have seen the adorable shots he took of her last week,” Anna gushed. “He is so good with babies...well, all the kids. He’ll make a great daddy one day.”

Robynn closed her eyes for a split second as her insides twirled with pain. She loved kids and the one thing she'd always hoped for was a child of her own. Without realizing it, she had raised a hand to her stomach.

"You know, Mitch, too?" said Nate.

"Yes, he's a...a friend of mine. We attend the same church."

"Maybe you should make him more than a friend, Robynn," said Anna. "He's awfully cute."

She didn't need to be told that. Yes, Mitchell Regan was cute, standing six foot two in his bare feet with a natural tan which seemed to make his sandy-blond hair glow, broad shoulders, a smile to make any girl melt, and those profound brown eyes—the eyes that could charm anyone into anything. *Too bad I couldn't charm him the same way.*

Anna and Nate said their goodbyes and entered *Gimme a Latte*. Robynn knew she should either go on in as she promised Marina or go home. This is what was so difficult—remaining in the same circle as Mitch, pretending to be his friend, made her heart ache and yet she couldn't imagine severing any and all connection to him.

Oh, Lord, guard my heart. Being friends with him has been harder than I ever imagined.

Pushing the door open, she stepped inside. Well, her date this evening had been horrible already. Why not add awkward and embarrassing to the mix. Then it would be a perfect night.

Chapter Two

Mitch took another sip from his mug and then set it on the table in front of him. The place was booming with business. With the great spring weather that they'd been having, it must have coaxed everyone out tonight. Voices seemed to be reverberating off the tiled ceiling. He glanced around at all the spirited conversations going on around the coffee house with several couples smiling those special smiles at each other. Sometimes being in a roomful of happy, contented people could make you feel lonelier than staying at home by yourself.

His date tonight had been a complete bust. He never would have agreed to it if Marina and Chad hadn't talked him into it. Marcy was the cousin of one of their neighbors but she never even showed up. To be honest, the entire time he was waiting, all he could think about was how he wished it was Robynn coming to meet him.

He pushed a hand through his hair at the thought of Robynn and sat back in his seat with a long drawn-out breath. That they were still friends was the one consolation in dissolving their relationship—a consolation and a curse. It was almost too hard being around her and yet not being with her. After three years, she had slipped seamlessly not only into his heart but into his life. These last six months had been difficult as he tried to redesign his world without Robynn. If he could do it all over again, he wouldn't make the same mistake but it was too late now. There was no point in

debating the subject. She'd never take him back and he wasn't sure if God even wanted them together anymore.

The electric chime sounded at the door again and his eyes subconsciously turned to watch people go out and people come in. He focused on a woman entering all alone. She had dark brown hair, coming just past her shoulders, the color and texture of a velvety chocolate. It was Robynn. His heart did a little flip in his chest. He wasn't expecting to see her tonight. He jerked his head around and grabbed the newspaper from the table in front of him, attempting to look absorbed in the sports page. His face felt hot and the collar on his shirt seemed tighter than it had been a moment ago. He shifted in his seat and then stole a glance in her direction, sure that she had moved on to the counter to talk with Marina and Chad.

What he saw made it difficult to swallow. Robynn was coming toward his seat on the two person sofa. *The love seat*. Her blue-green eyes were pleasant and friendly. It was the expression she used time and time again since their break-up. The delight and sparkle from the past, before his stupendous blunder, were absent.

"Hey, Mitch. Who won?" She smiled and sat beside him.

It took Mitch a moment to collect himself and put coherent words together. "Who won?" He closed the open paper still in his hands and put it down on the table. "Oh, not the Angels." He chuckled, knowing Robynn was a die-hard fan.

"They'll make a come-back, mark my words. No one thought they'd win the World Series and they did."

Mitch relaxed his muscles just now realizing how tight he had been and situated his body into the corner of the couch so he could see her better. He

laughed at the fervor of her words and laid his arm across the back of the seat. "Without a doubt, I'm sure you're right."

"So, what are you up to tonight? I didn't expect to see you." She set her purse on the table and settled into the decorative pillows on the sofa. She seemed so relaxed and at ease with him—as if she'd had no trouble altering her relationship from girlfriend and fiancée to merely friend. *I wonder what her secret is.*

"Oh, you don't even want to know," he replied.

"Yes, I do." Her head tilted to the side and she scooped a piece of hair behind her ear in a graceful motion. She seemed sincere in her apparent desire to know what was going on in his life even after everything he'd put her through. She was a friend he truly didn't deserve.

"Well," he leaned in closer as if he had a big secret to share. "I was on a date." He gave her a playful wink.

He'd expected her to smile and laugh at him as she usually did. Instead, her mouth turned down into a frown and her eyes grew at least one size larger. Then she looked off to a window and slid further away in her seat. "Were you really?"

"Yeah. What about you? You seem a little beat."

She looked back over at him with her mouth twisted to the side, inhaled a breath through her nose and released it slowly. "Well, as a matter of fact, I was on a date too...and it was just awful." She crossed her arms and sat back against Mitch's arm which was situated atop the cushions of the sofa.

She peered over at him with a glistening of tears building in her aqua-tinted eyes, appearing as beautiful as a glassy ocean. Without thinking, he wrapped his arm around her shoulders protectively. "What is it, Robynn? What happened tonight?"

She moved forward and pulled a tissue from her

purse. Sitting back, she settled into the curve of his arm and wiped her eyes. "Nothing. Nothing happened." She finished wiping her eyes and lowered the tissue in her lap. "I don't know why I'm crying." She puffed out a breath of air.

"So, tell me about this date. Was he as tall and handsome as me?" He smiled and tried to coax one out of her. She almost seemed like she might give in until she peered deeply into his face and then her eyes began to well up again.

She dabbed at her eyes and then smiled. "Well, he was about six foot five and he took me out to his lumberjack cabin. Boy, did he sweep me off my feet."

"Seriously?"

"No, Mitch, not seriously. To tell the truth, I think he was about five nine and he sells T-shirts on the beach for a living. He stepped on my toes, spilled soup on my pants and then..."

"And then..." he urged.

"Then he started to cry when I told him I needed to leave early."

"He cried? Really?" A huge laugh loomed up inside Mitch and he used all his willpower to hold it back. He tightened his hold around her shoulder, giving her a squeeze. "See, you made it through. You know it's kind of interesting that we both had dates tonight."

"Yes, I guess so." She patted her nose with the tissue and sniffed. "Oh, I forgot to ask. How was your date?"

Mitch felt the twitch of his mouth pulling to the side. He released a quiet snicker. "Mine was better than yours." He paused for dramatic effect. "She never even showed up."

Robynn's expression turned to wistful concern. She reached out and touched his leg in a consoling manner. "No, Mitch. That's horrible."

Her touch was gentle and soft. He couldn't resist

covering her hand with his. Robynn peered at him realizing what she'd done. With a pained expression in her face, she pulled her hand away.

"I'm sorry, Mitch. I didn't mean..."

"Forget it. I guess old habits die hard."

A partial smile formed on her sweet lips. "Yes, I suppose so."

"If you don't mind me asking, was this your first time out since...well, you know."

She nodded her head, her lips straight but firm. "Yes, it was. And you?"

"Yep. I guess we crashed and burned the first time of out the gate."

"You know, Mitch, don't you find it odd that we both had such horrible dates the first time we ventured out after our...break-up." The last two words came out in a soft but forced manner, her jaw somewhat clenched.

"Yeah, it is." He glanced at the counter to see Marina and Chad looking straight at them with identical conspiratorial smiles on their faces. The Anthonys were a short, pudgy pair. It must be true that couples begin to look alike the longer they're together because they were like two peas in a pod with their matching brown hair, blue eyes, and similar expressions. When they noticed him looking, they turned away guiltily, their smiles growing larger.

"You know, Robynn, I think we've been set-up."

"Set-up? Yes, I was set-up. It was a blind date, but I can't for the life of me figure out why Marina and Chad thought I would have gotten along with Norman Clark."

"That's my point. Marina and Chad set me up on a blind date that never showed. You had the date from a sitcom episode."

Robynn sat up straight. "We *were* set-up!"

Mitch glanced at the counter again. Robynn

turned around to look as well, her face close to his, sending his pulse racing. As he glanced down, she turned her eyes up to him and they locked onto each other. The pull to kiss her here and now was intense. “Robynn, I think they were hoping we might bump into each other tonight and talk just like we have.”

Realization entered her eyes. She began to nod her head as she spoke. “I know Marina was terribly disappointed when we didn’t get married.” She swallowed hard on the last word, her eyes glistening again.

“I think there were several people disappointed about that but maybe we don’t have disappoint them tonight.”

“What do you mean?” A stony expression entered her hooded eyes as she deeply assessed him. She didn’t trust him any further than she could throw him and he couldn’t blame her.

After taking her hand firmly into his, they sat back into the couch. It seemed like an eternity since he’d held her hand so intimately. It gave him the courage to go on. “Come take a walk with me. Marina and Chad are only looking out for our benefit and maybe they’re right. We need to talk.”

“All right.” She didn’t seem one-hundred percent sure about this but her expression had softened with her cheeks warming into a slight pink color as she looked at him in a way she hadn’t in a long time.

Mitch blew out a quick breath while his pulse increased yet again. It was time to put his heart on the line.

Chapter Three

Mitch was still holding her hand when they exited the coffee house. Robynn glanced at Marina and Chad before the door closed behind her. Marina smiled and nodded her head as if to encourage her to go on with Mitch, but Robynn wasn't so sure this was the right decision. She had worked so hard to distance herself emotionally from Mitch and going off alone with him now went against everything she had ever promised to herself.

It was Thanksgiving when she had given Mitch an ultimatum about their wedding because she was tired of waiting on him. He never even responded, let her walk away and they had both just calmly allowed things to grow quiet between them while pretending to be friendly. But it was all a guise. She was still hurt and angry at Mitch, and as they continued down the street to the park in the center of town, irritation at the situation sparked into burning anger.

Several steps away from that particularly special magnolia tree, Robynn stopped short and pulled her hand away from the strong one holding it. "I can't go any further with you, Mitch. Especially not over there." She motioned with her head over to the tall tree ahead of them—the very spot where Mitch had proposed to her. The spot where they had shared several picnics and even a couple memorable kisses.

Mitch stared at her with consideration, nodding his head. "That's understandable, Robynn. Why

don't we go sit on that bench instead?" He pointed to the metal park bench a few feet to their right. She followed him over and took a seat beside him.

Robynn folded her hands in her lap, rolled her shoulders back and held her head straight, waiting for what he thought they needed to talk about. But if she really started talking about what had been on her mind all this time, she might have to ask for forgiveness afterward. She released a breath through close lips in an attempt to calm herself.

Mitch looked out at the playground equipment in the distance, the bright street lamps illuminating his profile. He was definitely not comfortable with whatever it was he was about to say and she was glad of it. It was time he felt a little distress over this whole situation.

He turned abruptly to her with bright eyes. There might have even been some moisture there. "Robynn, I messed up. I'm sorry. In all this time, I never asked for your forgiveness but I should have. I'm sorry."

Robynn felt her heart melt several degrees. She crossed her arms in an attempt to keep her courage up. "What are you sorry about exactly, Mitch? About the fact that you asked me to marry you and then a year later you still wouldn't let me plan the wedding or set the date. Or is it because I wasted three years of my life believing that you loved me?"

He slid across the bench and moved as if he might take her hand but refrained and instead rested against the back of the bench. "I was crazy to think you could wait indefinitely. Things don't stand still. They're always moving, always changing. The bottom line is that I was afraid and then when you gave me that ultimatum, I got angry at you."

"*You* were angry at *me*?" she replied, bristling from the inside out.

"You didn't seem to understand that some

people need more time.”

“Some people seemed like they were never going to be ready.”

“It wouldn’t have been never. I was just being careful, making sure it was right.”

“Sometimes you just have to have faith.”

“You’re right.” He tipped his eyes down to his lap and smiled. What was he smiling about? Nothing about this was funny.

His eyes moved back up to hers. The expression was serious again...well, more like intense. It made her pulse trip. “Honestly, Robynn, I didn’t even understand what love really was. I was blinded by my own selfishness and what I wanted. I didn’t appreciate what a blessing your love and even more your very presence was to me. Do you know what torture it has been for me to see your face each Sunday morning or at a single’s activity and not be able to tell you how much I love you, not even be able to look at you like I want to?”

An icy chill raced down Robynn’s spine, causing her to shiver. Her stomach seemed to drop down to her knees as her equilibrium fell off. She reached out and held the bottom of the bench to steady herself. “You still love me?” She almost choked on the words. It was what she had been hoping to hear from him for the past six months.

“Yes, of course, I still love you. How could I stop?” He reached his hand out this time and took hers captive, bringing it back to his lap.

Tears sprung to her eyes and she knew she was about to start blubbering and she couldn’t allow that to happen in front of him. She sucked in a calming breath and exhaled, hoping to find the strength as two renegade tears slipped down her cheek. “Tell me why then, Mitch. Why? You broke my heart.”

“I don’t know. I’ve been asking myself the same question since the night you walked away.”

Robynn turned her face from his view. Just like herself, he'd been wondering how this had ever happened to them. But if he was just as miserable, why hadn't he done anything to rectify the situation? She'd always believed that he just didn't care enough about her when he let her go so easily.

"Since we broke up, the only thing keeping me afloat has been my relationship with God and keeping my head in His Word."

Robynn turned back to look at him, his sincere eyes greeting her as he continued. "I now understand in a way I never did when we were together that love is a gift, a gift God brings to us and I took it for granted. It's just like it says in I Corinthians 13: *'Love is patient, love is kind...'*"

"Mitch, you don't have to quote the passage to me."

"Yes, I do." He took her other hand and held one in each of his own as his eyes stared point blank into hers. "*Love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly, it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.'* Robynn that description is you. You understood love; I didn't. Even after the break-up, you never stopped caring about me or being a friend to me when I didn't deserve it." He paused for a moment. "I never meant to hurt you." He said the last sentence slow with heartfelt emphasis.

The honest look in his big, brown eyes, the feel of his hold around her hands was almost too much. But what was he really trying to say? Did he just want her forgiveness? Did he want her to know how he had grown spiritually through this situation? Or did he want her back?

Robynn pulled her hands free and stood from